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THE IMAGE OF EVE



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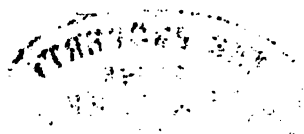
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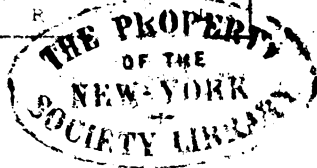
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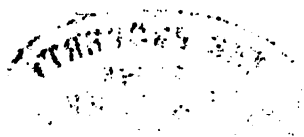


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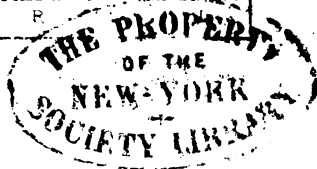


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[See page 227]

"YOU WON'T TAKE HER FAR—WILL YOU?"

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THE IMAGE *of Eve*

A ROMANCE WITH
ALLEVIATIONS

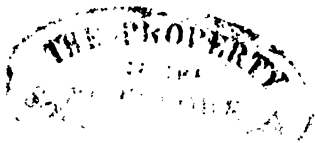
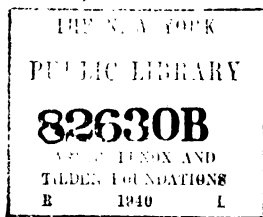
BY
MARGARET SUTTON BRISCOE



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TO
C. D. H.
FOR MANY REASONS
MOST OF THEM UNKNOWN TO HER

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THE IMAGE OF EVE

I

THE BORN CHAPERON



HAT is a Subrikinque?

To simplify matters, let me, anticipating the fuller explanation to follow, state at once that *Subrikinque* is a term which, in our intimate circle, has come to stand definitely for a super-qualified chaperon, warranted by birth and by education to fulfil all the plenipotentiary duties, large and small, that might properly attach to the cult.

Let me note, too, that mere matrimony does not create this office, nor yet choice. Use alone, and, as it appears, unconscious, even unwilling use, seems best calculated to force into being the Subrikinque.

It is possible, for instance, that I have been

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for years, unknowingly, fulfilling a rôle which I am now informed is my fate in life—but, however that may be, it was left to Peter de Koven to disclose to me my accredited vocation.

I was one day, by some chance word, awakened to the fact that Peter was no longer so young as he had been. Indeed, he was not young at all. The subject once engaging my attention, I began to perceive various indicative hall-marks which Time leaves as he passes. Therefore, it seemed to me expedient to hold a little conclave with our neighbor, and, when he next dropped in upon us, to point out to him, delicately, that the years were flying; the home he lived in was, after all, a mere old bachelor's hall, where, as the seasons came and went, he would find each year less and less of that home life which, as I viewed it, man needs and should have. In the course of my argument I drew a picture, touching as I could make it, of those lonely, desolate days ahead, when old age would inevitably overtake him as he sat, solitary of an evening, by his fireside, where but one arm-chair now rested.

The tableau, with others of like character, I painted as eloquently as I was able to speak—I was moved myself by the visions conjured up

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—while Peter sat by our warm, blazing hearth listening to me in silence. “In a word,” I finally explained, “dear friend, I want you to ponder seriously”—my courage almost failed me here; but I went on—“over the question of—of your *marriage*.”

“I have been thinking of you very often of late, and I am not quite happy about you. More than that, I am not sure that we—this household, I mean, and some of your other friends—are doing our duty by you. We so delight in your cheering society, we so enjoy what we call ‘having you round,’ we give you no chance to be desolate or lonely, as an old bachelor should properly feel.

“There is nothing forlorn about you. How could there be? You have your own particular chair here by our hearth and half a dozen other hearths. Your place at our tables is always spread, or you know we are but too eager to welcome you. We are merely quarrelling as to which of us shall have you—and it’s all wrong!

“We are simply encouraging you in your evil courses. Why should you marry while you enjoy this wealth of vicarious domesticity?

“You have all the joys of hearth and home, and most of its dear sorrows, too.”

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And here I could not fail to speak with feeling:

“‘You have eaten our bread and salt,
Drunk our water and wine,
The deaths we died you have watched beside’ . . .

“‘You give far more to us than we can think of returning to you, but for that very reason we owe it to you to—*cut down your domestic rations*. If you have less domesticity through us, you will feel the need of it in your life; then you’ll marry. Which is what you ought to do. I hate to say it, but—vicarious domesticity has not the lasting quality. We shall never mean to shut you out, never; but you know we are set in the world in families, and, no matter how one tries, one’s own family comes first. I want you to have a family life of your very own, where *you* will always be first.”

It was at this point that Peter interrupted me.

“As a matter of course,” he said, “all nice people of our age ought to be married.”

“Our age!” I remonstrated. “You know you are years younger than I am.”

In our early playmate days Peter de Koven and I were of an equal youth. He is much

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younger now than I am. Any bachelor is younger than any married woman. A mere question of years does not enter. These facts I set swiftly before him.

"We are thirty-five," he stated, firmly, "and I am your senior by several good months. Every word you have spoken to me is as true as gospel. I will give the matter my serious consideration. I will tie a knot in my watch-chain, see! That will serve to remind me. You have not escaped your fate, have you?" he went on, gravely. "A Subrikinque you were born, a Subrikinque you are to be."

"*Subrikinque!*" I cried. "What *does* that mean? Where did you get that amazing word? It sounds so strangely familiar, too."

"It isn't possible you have forgotten the sand-dune lovers you used to Subrikinque—at the tender age of eight?" said Peter.

And then I remembered. It came back to me as if it were yesterday, the whole occurrence.

Peter and I were playmates and companions at the same seashore resort where they carried on their little game—that sand-dune pair. They were not advertised lovers, not formally what is called "engaged" when they arrived at the shore, and, as I look back on the episode,

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I am not sure that they were engaged while there or when they left. I know they were never married—not to each other. I can perfectly recall the burst of Homeric laughter at our breakfast-table when, in my childish, fluttering treble, I announced, to the assembled family that Peter de Koven had told me a young gentleman was coming to visit them. "The gentleman," I quoted, "who *seems* to be engaged to the young lady who is coming to visit us."

I could not imagine why my family were so unduly entertained by this information. I had then no idea that any one "played the game" save seriously, and, as it were, in the sight of Heaven. I have since suffered ruder shocks, but my first disillusion came from that sand-dune pair, as they grew to be called, owing to their nightly rambles along the beaches. Rambles to the contrary, they were a conventional couple, with a sophisticated respect for Mrs. Grundy. My infant vanity was touched and flattered by our young lady guest's apparent devotion to me. She seemed to desire my company greatly on those moonlight rambles from which the three of us would return—each night much later than the night previous.

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I cannot remember precisely what opened my eyes. I can, however, perfectly recall the scene and the hour of my revolt.

I was sitting in the moonlight on the porch steps when the "sand-dune pair" came down the path, and, as of custom, waited for me.

"I believe I want to go to bed to-night," I stated, stolidly; and, their surprised reproaches having no effect upon my decision, I let them roam off alone.

"That was not very polite of you, daughter," said my father, from his chair on the porch. "You always have gone with them. Why not to-night?"

My reply was as calm as it was final.

"I'm not going with them any more at all. I've quit being a Subrikinque."

Subrikinque—where in the world had I unearthed my astonishing word? I have never known where I found it; but what it expressed seemed as plain to my amused family as it was to me. The nickname clung to me for a long period; then it was forgotten, until Peter de Koven thus fished it up from the depths of ancient history and rechristened me in the moment when I thrust an intrusive, match-maker's finger into his private affairs.

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"No," I stated, after a little thought. "I am not a Subrikinque; not if that implies a chaperon, and, incidentally, a matchmaker. I should be afraid to play the rôle of a kind of marriage-advocate, a propagandist, a sower of sentimental seed; though you can't expect the mother of some half-a-dozen children, more or less—and such children—and the wife of the husband I have married—and such a husband—not to be biassed. Yes, I am prejudiced in favor of matrimony. Why wouldn't I be?"

Peter sat and looked into the fire from his side of the hearth, and I looked into the fire from my side.

"I'll tell you what I am thinking if you will tell me what you are thinking," he said, suddenly. "Is it a trade?"

"Yes," I said. "It's a trade."

"Then you play first."

"I was thinking," I said, laughing, "of what you called me just now—a born Subrikinque; and I was wondering if what you have said of me can be true, and, if so, how I might best and soonest escape such a fate. I am forever having chaperon duty thrust upon me. I don't like it. I don't feel I do it well. I make the direst mistakes; but as I think of it—yes, you

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are right, I am almost a professional chaperon, engaged in the business so constantly I ought to be an expert. I'd like never to see a young couple again. Sometimes I feel as if I ate and drank lovers—I see so much of them! Do you know, Sweetie van Rustle says—”

Peter threw back his head and shouted with laughter.

“Now it's coming!” he cried. “You can't deny I haven't waited patiently. I've been dying to hear the story of that Van Rustle house-party since the day you came back from the encounter. I knew something happened there. Your very back hair told the tale; your coiffure was severe for at least a week after, not a puff or a stray curl about it; and as to your gait, your carriage—martial! You can't say I have bothered you. I've given you all the time there was. When I heard that Sweetie had asked you to be their house-party Subrikinque—”

“You are entirely mistaken,” I interrupted. “You don't understand Sweetie. She is a loving, impulsive girl, with no harm in the world in her heart or her head. She nearly drove me wild before the house-party week was over; but so did all of them—girls and boys.”

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"Sweetie told me," said Peter—he was examining the knot in his watch-chain, and I could not see his eyes; his face was grave enough—"that at her last house-party (the last but one, I mean; not—oh, no!—not the one when you were Subrikinque) the chaperon objected to some frivolity, so they swung her up on the high colonial mantelpiece, and left her there. I asked if the lady wasn't angry, but Sweetie said: 'No, she didn't seem to be, not really.' She added, reflectively, that the Subrikinque in office that week had on a very fetching pair of slippers with the highest heels she ever beheld."

"Sweetie told me that story when she asked me to act as their chaperon," I said. "She informed me she wanted some one for this party who would—well, who wouldn't—who—"

"Wouldn't be swung to mantels, eh?" said Peter de Koven. "No, I cannot easily imagine that contingency. But what did happen?"

"Nothing very much," I answered. "I suppose I am merely old-fashioned. Sweetie has no mother. It touched me, somehow, to have her ask me to act as her chaperon. She's not stupid; far from it. She knows exactly what I would stand—and not stand—as a chaperon."

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Don't you see all it implied, her not choosing again the lady of the high-heeled slippers? But I don't think I could ever be induced to repeat the experiment. I didn't—I didn't exactly like the—the—”

“The job?”

“That about expresses it,” I answered. “The first thing that made me uncomfortable—a little—was when I walked into the library one morning and *caught*—I can't use any more delicate term—one of my young couples. It was nothing very much amiss, not if it had been Biddy and the policeman; but I don't expect to find a young lady in our own class of life quite so—quite so—not exactly—you know what I mean!”

“Precisely,” said Peter. “That was most admirably put, and so lucid.”

“I wasn't thinking about the man, particularly—it was the girl I was annoyed with.”

“So I supposed,” agreed Peter, gravely. “There is one good thing about a born Subbrinque. She is always a woman, up and down, back and forth, through and through. One can always know just how you will look at a thing, and where to find you—right in your petticoats. Of *course* the girl was to blame.

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Did you speak to them? I'm rather thankful you never were a Subrikinque to me, except in an abstract way. I like better belonging to your generation than the generation under you. What did you do?"

"Nothing. I pretended I didn't see, and I slipped out with a book I hadn't come to get. I spoke to Sweetie about it. I didn't give her the names of the actors, of course—merely the incidents. And what do you suppose the child said?—her eyes as big and blue as a baby's: '*Maybe she knew him very well.*' Now, wasn't that?—oh, of course you can only sit there and laugh. It seemed to me—"

"Seriousness itself," laughed Peter. He wiped the tears from his eyes. "You mustn't take me so seriously, either," he urged. "I can't help laughing, because I think it was—as I knew it would be—the most humorous proceeding, your being Subrikinque at one of Sweetie's house-parties. Maybe I understand that little coterie, Subrikinque though you be, better than you do. I have an exhaustless optimism as to the ultimate good in young people of their variety. I don't discuss their good or bad taste. As to morals—high animal spirits is the worst you can possibly say of

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them with truth. But they need a cow-puncher as a chaperon—not you, not you! What next?"

I could not help laughing myself as I recalled the next item of that week's history.

"I was thinking," I said, "of my subtle effort to train Sweetie a little. I didn't like to tell her directly what I wanted her to know, but I did want her to understand how a nice, well-bred girl should view such matters; so I told her a story of my own mother's youth, about a girl who was walking in a garden alone with a young man, and he—he put his arm around her—"

"Oh!" said Peter de Koven.

"Wait! It's a good story; a splendid moral to it. The girl said: 'Sir, I see we have both been mistaken. I have thought that you were a gentleman, and you are not. You have thought that I was not a lady—and I am.' And what do you—you can't imagine what Sweetie did!"

"I don't know about that," said Peter. "I am already familiar with the history of the lady who told her children never to thrust beans into their little noses."

I nodded. "You have the idea. When I told her the story Sweetie's reply, in the vernac-

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ular, was—hands clasped, eyes shining—can't you see her?—"I want to say that! Oh, I *wish* somebody *would* give me the chance. It's the best 'throw-down' I *ever* heard!"

"You couldn't call her a sentimentalist, anyhow," said Peter. "Did she get her chance?"

"She made it. She picked out the most respectful and nicest fellow in the party, and—this is her own version—while they were walking on the porch in the twilight she goaded him into seizing her hand, and then she drew herself up and said—really, you ought to have heard her tell me the story—"Sir, I see we have both been mistaken. I thought you were a gentleman, and you are a lady—" And she said he held on to the porch-rail and 'roared with laughter.' I imagine she 'roared' with him; she did when she told me the story. 'It didn't sound right at all,' she said. 'I knew I'd get it twisted.' No, I shall not chaperon for them again, or for any one else." I quoted from past history. "I've 'quit being a Subrikinque.'"

"Oh no, you haven't," said Peter de Koven. "Don't deceive yourself." Something serious in his voice made me look up at him quickly. He was playing with that knot he had tied in his watch-chain, the reminding token.

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"You never will 'quit' being one. You may sublimate the office a bit, but a Subrikinque you were born, and one you will die. You could as easily 'quit' breathing. You Subrikinques know too much, that's the trouble. You understand too well what your victims need, and, for the sympathetic souls of you, you can't forbid yourselves trying to help us to our advantage. Take Sweetie, for instance. You can't, you won't deny yourself to her. I know you will be her Subrikinque whenever she asks you; she knows it; you know it. Take me next—you know precisely what I most need, and—wasn't it a bit cruelly done?—you've showed me in this half-hour, too clearly, my lack. I felt it before; but not so poignantly. I couldn't have put it in words. It's you Subrikinques who make most of the marriages they talk about being made in heaven. You learn—mercy, how fast you learn it!—all that your husbands ever knew, and when you have superimposed that man's knowledge on your own amazing wisdoms—you are invincible. You sensitize and befuddle those of us who have shrewdly escaped the wiles of maidens until we believe there's nothing in life for the unmarried. We ought to wear camphor-bags when we visit you!

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Your atmosphere is infection. No, it isn't the unmarried who make the marriages—it's you born chaperons. I told you I'd trade my thought for yours just now. I was thinking that you had struck in hard under the fifth rib—deeper than you knew—when you said I ought to have—well, what all of you married ones have that I run with. But there's something I most miss which you haven't yet mentioned. *You none of you care as much for me as you do for each other.* No, you do not. You talk a jargon I can't understand—together. You all belong to a great fraternity; only the initiated can qualify. You talk about 'some day shutting me out.' I have never been in. You don't mean to keep me on the outside—you *can't* take me in, that's the trouble. We haven't the same code of signals. There's but one way to gain membership, to understand what you initiates know, and that way—"Again his fingers played with the knot in his chain. "Dear Subrikinque," he cried, as he rose and held out his hand, "be patient with me! There are some things even a born Subrikinque cannot manage or understand or—hurry."

"Oh," I cried, "I am so sorry I spoke! I didn't know—I—"

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"Don't worry," he said, smiling. "I'm all right. I'm happy as the day is long—or I shall be."

But I was not happy all the rest of the day; and that knot, which, strangely enough, Peter still leaves in his watch-chain, has become a source of trouble to me whenever I see him. Why didn't I let what was well enough alone? Peter de Koven was right when he called me a Subrikinque. If I am one, knowing my failing now, I should be able to correct it. But is it, after all, a fault? If experience has taught me that the great fraternity which Peter says we married ones belong to is worth while—and more—why pretend that one does not feel—what one feels? Yet no one could wish to be, advertisedly, responsible for the marriages of others. One marriage, her own, is enough, in all conscience, for one woman to be answerable for.

Is it possible, he seemed so interested, that Peter—he almost confessed that he cares for some one, in vain—can it be possible that it is Sweetie? No, no, it can't; it *must* not be—Sweetie van Rustle.

There must be some one else for him who would exactly suit him, who—

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I will not be a Subrikinque. This is the way a born chaperon would think, plan, act. And yet—how can I help wishing that Peter was one of us? He is too right in saying that one who is not initiated may never really be admitted into this greatest fraternity, and to be there—it is so pleasant.

II

A MAID OF HONOR



WONDER if I have been, instinctively, supposing that there is a kind of gender for certain human proclivities. If I have accepted this as a dictum I have to-day discovered my error. I have now fairly arrived at the conclusion that nothing is of one sex, but that the eternal feminine and the perpetual masculine are represented equally in everything reprehensible or approved.

Angela has taught me this unpalatable truth, if truth it be; but while I was learning my lesson through her, she was quite unaware that any one was pupil, save herself. It was not an investigation at which I relished assisting. Being a woman myself, and having, perhaps, my own reservations, which I claim the right to retain, the subject, while interesting, was a trifle too heart-searching. As one somewhat in love with

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my own sex, I have been, with not a few wry faces, adjusting my digestion to the acceptance of certain humiliating convictions forced upon me through poor little Angela's recent experience.

She is a sweet girl—is Angela—and very pretty, and she has also in her favor that perfectly meritless, perfectly fascinating charm of mere, mere youth.

Further, she has remained plump and wholesome somehow, in spite of the really hard work she does, serving on all kinds of philanthropic boards and committees. Angela is good, as good as gold—her eyes, her mouth, say that; no one could fail to see it; and usually, too, she is a graceful girl; but as she hurried into my sitting-room, where I was sewing by my fireside, she was so greatly excited by something which she had evidently come to tell me that, in her agitation, she brushed too near and upset my work-basket. You know what that means if you are a woman; even if a man, you may imagine! If there is anything that irritates me it is to have my work-basket upset. It's a good old-fashioned family basket—none of your "fancy-work" affairs—and when it is flung

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bottom side up it seems as if *tons* of material—buttons, scraps, spools—drop out.

Angela was down on her knees in a moment scooping up my possessions, and trying, to the best of her necessarily limited ability, to tell me her news while, in the same breath, she apologized for her awkwardness. The effect was as though she was uttering one set of phrases with her lips and the other with her tongue.

"Oh, I am so sorry! Haven't you seen the morning paper? Wasn't I careless! I am so excited. Where do your buttons belong? I do think the reporters ought all to be— Don't—don't step on your thimble! I suppose they got the news from— It's almost under your foot—" At that moment Peter de Koven was announced. He was carrying in his hand—Angela saw it at a glance—the morning paper.

"Oh, *you've* read it, then!" cried Angela. She forgot the débris that surrounded her, and knelt there with her hands clasped, gazing up at Peter.

"Yes," he said, solemnly. "Yes, I've just read it, Miss Angela. Pretty bad, isn't it?"

He stood looking down at her as she still knelt at his feet.

There is no attitude which so becomes An-

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gela as the attitude of petition. Her pew in the church, where we worship in common, is across the aisle from mine, and I have to confess that she distracts my mind from my own devotions because hers are so engaging. I have always had a curious weakness for feminine beauty. When I see a pretty young thing, one as pretty as Angela, she attracts me so I can hardly keep my eyes from her face—especially if some phase she is passing through enhances her beauty. I cannot, for the life of me help watching Angela during the hour of worship. My husband has more than once warned me that, were I a young gentleman, my conduct might be termed unseemly—so closely do I follow Angela's motions in the neighboring pew.

"Were you of the opposite sex," he says, "the sexton might speak to you. If I," he went on, "were to pay half the attention to Miss Angela that you pay, you would very speedily—"

Of course that is all nonsense, and there really is no reason I should not enjoy Angela's pretty and most becoming pieties, as we are of a sex.

When I looked at Angela kneeling there at Peter's feet, all her soul in those worshipful

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gray eyes of hers, it seemed to me it needed only a stained-glass window as background to make this week-day picture as perfect as it is of a Sunday across the aisle. I have yet to see the young girl who did not look at Peter de Koven with a degree of that same expression, or, at the least, a reverential interest. He has a great influence with young women, a perfectly unconscious aptitude for popularity among them. He has shepherded more *débutantes* to success and advised more young women to their best interests—or whatever he and they call it—than any other individual of my acquaintance. They trust him, it seems, implicitly and on sight; and he has won, as the years pass, a kind of traditional Sir Oracle position among them; doubtless richly deserved if, as is presumable, he advises them with that same affectionate devotion, that combined worldly wisdom and kindness, which he uses toward all his friends, men or women, old and young.

All this I understood, and yet I confess to a distinct sense of irritation when I saw our nice, good little Angela kneeling at Peter's feet with that expression upon her face which was calculated to spoil any man, however seasoned.

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A woman does not belong on her knees, save in a pew; certainly she is out of place kneeling before any male of the species. As for a man—he always may kneel to his God or his sweetheart. In both cases he is only where he belongs, which is never unbecoming to any one.

“Do get up, Angela,” I said. “I’ll ring for the maid and ask her to pick up these things, or we can tell—”

“Tell me to do it,” inserted Peter, stooping as he spoke. “That just about expresses the difference of deference shown to me and to the hirelings in this house. Madame *asks* them, she *tells* me. So you have got in ahead of me with the news, Miss Angela? And is this the way the lady took it?” He reached in under the sofa and drew out some miles of bobbin and tape and darning-cotton. “I should have thought,” he went on, “that a Subrikinque of such rank and experience would have shown that self-control and fine decorum in the face of any scandal—”

“It was I who upset the work-basket,” said Angela. “But what in the world is a *Subrikinque*?”

“Don’t you know?” said Peter. “A Subrikinque is a—would you call it a classical char-

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acter?" He appealed to me; but receiving no encouragement: "It means, Miss Angela," he explained, "a kind of cross between a chaperon and a—well—a *cupid*, eh?"

"As to that," I answered, carelessly, "I have no information. But what is this exciting item in your morning's paper? I haven't had time to glance at mine."

"It's all about our club president!" cried Angela. "I knew you'd be glad to hear of it—no, I mean I knew you'd be sorry to hear of it, so I ran in—"

"That was most thoughtful of you," said Peter. "And I ran in, too, on precisely the same errand—to fetch news to you I knew you would be so sorry to hear. You can't say we are not good neighbors to you—Miss Angela and I."

"It's nothing that concerns me very much, I'm sure of that," I said, "or you wouldn't be breaking it to me in this fashion. Sit down, both of you, and tell me sensibly." I took up my sewing again with great placidity.

"It's our club president," repeated Angela. "Oh, I hate to tell you! It isn't said right out in the paper, but it's all told in that kind of veiled way—you know their horrid custom!"

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You remember our new club-house was to be furnished all through—it meant quite an outlay—and they accuse our president of accepting, as a bribe, a full set of dining-room furniture from the dealer who has the contract to furnish the club-house. I know it's not true, not a word of it! I'm so glad I was there—I was with the president when the whole thing happened. I want to write a letter to the papers—explaining it. I hoped you'd help me. Won't you help me, too, Mr. de Koven?"

"You were there when the whole thing happened, and yet you say it didn't happen," stated Peter. "You won't say that in your letter, will you?"

"No, no; you don't understand. It did happen—in a way; but it was all right. You see, I am on the committee, with the president, for the furnishing of the club-house; so of course I was right there with her when the contract was made. The dealer didn't give her any dining-room set at all. He donated a dining-room set—it was a little shop-worn—to the Children's Home. You know our president has been a director for the Children's Home for years and years, and she's bound up in the work. What harm was there in that? It was a donation,

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just like anybody else's. Why shouldn't she have taken it? There never was such a dear, good, honest woman in the world—and they say she ought to resign from the presidency. What do you think of that! What do you think of it, Mr. de Koven?" She looked from one of us to the other. I went on with my sewing and made no reply. I had glanced up at Peter, as we were both appealed to, and saw that he also was looking away from Angela. He was fingering that unfortunate knot in his watch-chain, for which I feel so uncomfortably responsible whenever I see it.

I had not yet been able to decide, though I had been sifting the matter pretty carefully in my mind, who it could be that Peter had half-confessed he sighed for. It might easily be that little handful, Sweetie van Rustle, or it might, and as easily, be any one of a dozen other possibilities; but he had bent not unyielding eyes upon pretty Angela as she knelt there at his feet. There was very much in her that a man like Peter de Koven might bring out and perfect. She certainly had beauty and sweetness, and her mission in life seemed that of a public consoler. Why, if Peter was in need of consolation, shouldn't Angela specialize

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and console in private life, where she now generalized in church and civic affairs? I have always thought she was far too pretty to be so—I hardly know how to express myself; for I approve, heartily enough, of all of Angela's activities for somebody else to be active in. Then, it would be so convenient, too. She lives just round the corner from Peter de Koven, and— Anyhow, it could do no possible harm, it occurred to me, for me to continue to be very busy with my stitching and leave it to Peter to settle Angela's bewildering little problems for her. As I did not speak, he had to.

"What I think is not very important," he said—he sounded a trifle embarrassed. "In a general way," he went on, non-committally, "I rather believe it's, perhaps—safer, not to accept anything from anybody while one is—negotiating trust funds. You see—"

He looked over at me appealingly. I was still very busy, stitching around and around the braid on my little Daphne's hat.

Peter then rose to his occasion. He got up from his seat, moved to the chair close by Angela's, and as he spoke—he didn't touch her, he never moved an inch nearer than that to her, but it was, in effect, exactly as if he

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had most comfortingly lifted Angela's small hand in his, and was kindly stroking it as he talked to her. There you have Peter de Koven.

"No. Your president ought not to have taken the donation, or anything else, from the dealer," he began, and then he laughed and looked over at me. "That lady sitting there," he said, "she knows as well as I do why your president ought not to have accepted the furniture, and just why it may make all kinds of trouble. She knows, *better* than I do, that your eyes, my dear Miss Angela—constantly engaged in public work as you are—ought to be wide open to the facts in this case, and she knows I don't want to open them, and that it's her plain duty to do so. I don't know why she's sitting there stitching, stitching, when she ought to be, and she knows it, preaching, preaching. I've observed how she never fails to preach to me when half a chance offers. For some reason of her own, she's delegating her job to me. Do you want me to tell you a few things about—graft?"

"Oh!" cried Angela. "Don't—don't call it that!"

"If you shy so at the start, how do you ex-

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pect me to finish?" laughed Peter. "If I talk at all, I warn you, I'll have to go from bad to worse."

"Go on," said Angela (as one might say "Strikel"). She lifted eyes to Peter's face as Angela knows how to lift them. If it is unconscious it is really the most effective unconsciousness.

Peter took her at her word, and he did go on.

"I happen," he said, "to be rather informed on this subject. The study of women as grafters—that seems a pretty hard word, but I don't know how else to phrase it—is a most interesting investigation. I've been looking the data up a bit. I've had a notion that I might write a kind of letter to the papers myself. I intended calling it 'The Feminine of Graft.'" After this half-humorous prologue, Peter, with more gravity, talked out the whole matter, in all its aspects, with Angela.

As I sat listening to his remarks and her replies I could not quite make up my mind whether the utterly childish things she said, and kept saying, attracted him, or whether she attracted him in spite of her childishness. She certainly attracted him. There was no doubt

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as to that, and he would look at her at times with a positively indulgent affection.

"Now to give you some contrary exhibits," he said. (He had been producing the most astounding examples of women in public life misusing their power for private ends, until I could hardly maintain that silence I had pledged myself to keep.)

"To give you some contrary exhibits, I can tell you the story of a man who was handed a fifty-dollar note—no questions or promises asked, simply as a kind of earnest of more to follow if he proved himself the man it was hoped he would be. The bank-note was never actually proffered; that's not the way these things are handled. The office-holder simply found it lying near his hand on the table. It had arrived there, somehow, in the course of a conversation between him and the envoy, who was sounding him. The office-holder saw the note without seeming to see it, and, still talking pleasantly, he picked it up, held it in his fingers a moment, and then, still not appearing to look at it, lit his pipe with it.

"That's one way of meeting the test.

"Here's another:

"I happened to be in a down-town office

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when a New-Year's gift—it was a mere trifle, a card-case, I think—was returned to the donor thereof, who had sent it, as a small token of regard, to a public officer. The official wrote a very courteous letter with the returned article; he said he knew it might seem *finical*, but on taking office he had made up his mind not to accept any gifts of any kind, and could make no exceptions. The giver did not relish it particularly. He remarked, 'Methinks he doth protest too much'; but it's likely that public officer, taking his early stand, avoided having to light pipes with greenbacks."

From these instances, Peter went on to assert that the wisdom of such early and apparently "finical" care rose from the fact that graft and grafting was so subtle and deceptive a temptation.

"It takes," he claimed, "a prince, an emperor of grafters to admit to himself that he is in public service for his own pocket. You can easily see, Miss Angela, how personal honor and official dishonor are hard even for the most honest folk to keep separated and ticketed. We have to learn that it's not enough to be sweet, good, and innocent, not when public trusts are in question. When women do once

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begin to dip into it at all, they are the most accomplished, most unconscionable grafters—”

“Oh, oh!” cried Angela.

“I can’t take that back,” persisted Peter. “I admit you’ll often find a children’s home, or its equivalent, to extenuate a woman’s grafting, but it’s my conviction—you see what I mean, don’t you?—that just as often you will discover women in public life, otherwise as good as angels, pocketing bribes and patronage and little perquisites of all kinds, with no excuse whatever to cover the trick—except their own ignorance of how positively dishonest these practices are.”

I looked up to see the oddest expression on Angela’s face. Her cheeks were crimson. She was sitting perfectly still, listening, breathless, to Peter de Koven, and I saw plainly that, now, at least, it was not because it was Peter who spoke; what he said was deeply affecting her.

She had usually the serenest eyes, almost inhumanly serene—angelic. They were not serene now; they were very human.

“Oh, Mr. de Koven!” she cried. “I—I—” she began again, in a queer, fine little voice. “You see, I was on that furnishing committee

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with—with—our president, and I—and he—the dealer—”

“Don’t tell me, dear Miss Angela,” cried Peter, “that the dealer gave *you* a bedroom set!”

“No” (that same queer, fine little voice, fainter), “no, it was only a—little—inlaid—work-box. The handle was nicked—and—and— And there’s my vellum-bound book of psalms—when I bought the Sunday-school library, the bookseller told me—he said—it seemed right, really it did, when it happened! And there’s my— Oh, dear, dear, dear—there are ever and ever so many little things. What shall I do with them? I didn’t once think—”

I watched them from my window as they walked off together. Peter had asked permission to escort Angela to her home.

How good and kind he was to her; not a word too much or too little. No girl could greatly object to being in trouble—not with such consolation.

They look well together, too; just about the right heights. As she lives only round the corner from him— I *am* a Subrikinque! Why do I care who marries what? And yet— If

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only Peter de Koven could fall in love with a girl as sweet, as good, and as pretty (I do like them pretty) as Angela! I have to admit that Sweetie is more interesting than good, pretty little Angela. If Sweetie van Rustle ever took graft—*she'd* know exactly what she was taking. I'm not sure she'd light her cigarette with it, either. I'm not sure she doesn't smoke cigarettes. I'm not sure of anything! Well, thank Heaven, I don't have to be. They are none of them my daughters; and all this is none of my affairs; none at all, *whatever* happens. I wonder—I wonder—I wonder how much braid I ought to buy for little Daphne's hat. That *is* my affair.

Note first—Remember, that I am a wife and a mother and a housekeeper, which is enough to keep one woman sufficiently busy.

Note second—Remember, not to be a Subrikinque.

Note third—Remember, that to be of the feminine gender is not in itself an efficient protection from various sins of omission and commission that are popularly supposed to belong to the masculine half of creation. Q. E. D. Honor is a culture.

III

VICARIOUS DOMESTICITY



YOU told Peter de Koven that he enjoyed too much vicarious domesticity," said King, laughing. "You have good courage, haven't you? What is your idea of vicarious domesticity, if you please? So that's your notion of it—" he went on, when I had replied. "No, it's not been mine; not exactly."

"If I had held what seems to be your idea of it, I probably shouldn't have mentioned the matter to him at all," I answered.

"Possibly not," said my husband. "It happens"—he volunteered, casually—"that I have watched some vicarious domesticity which—" He broke off at this point, and rather obviously changed the conversation.

"Have you remembered that Mrs. Flutterbie's party is to-night?" he said.

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"What has she to do with domesticity?" I asked.

"Precious little," he answered. "We must remember to go—that's all."

I do not like her! I have shilly-shallied with it as long as I need to. I put off deciding what I thought of her, and tried my best to think neither one thing nor the other. It was all nonsense; for at the bottom of things I knew I could not like Mrs. Flutterbie, and that I never should. I know now precisely why I dislike her—I always have known, even while I was pretending to myself that I didn't, perhaps, quite understand her. The trouble was I *did* understand her, perfectly.

"Lalla-lalla-lalla," Mrs. Flutterbie's husband calls her; it's the name she is known by with all her intimates. I never so called, or mis-called, her; but that's her name with most people; for every stranger is a friend, and every friend a brother, to Lalla-lalla-lalla. She gained this name—it requires explanation—through a kind of yodle-call which she and the boys she grew up with used in signalling to each other—she has "grown up" with more boys than any other one woman I

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ever heard of. King happened to be one of them.

I realize now that hitherto my chief source of difficulty in dealing with Mrs. Flutterbie has been that King knew her before she was married—and before he was. If I had met Lalla-lalla-lalla with no such previous history to hamper me, I should simply have had nothing whatever to do with her. She's not at all my kind of woman. But if there is one thing I dislike above another, it is the type of wife who does not know how to "get on," as it is called, with her husband's old friends, so I made up my mind to see only the very best side of Mrs. Flutterbie. I fancy that before her marriage she was more or less like Sweetie van Rustle—only ever so much more so, and without that queer little streak of depth of nature which Sweetie certainly has. Married to the right kind of man, it is on the cards that Sweetie may deepen and deepen. If she marries a Mr. Flutterbie, she'll be—not ever quite as bad as Mrs. Flutterbie, but of that same quality.

King says that Lalla-lalla-lalla never "had any harm in her"; she was always just a "larky, crazy kind of a girl, game for anything anybody

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proposed." In a moment of more detailed speech, he also stated that she "was the only girl he'd ever kissed under water." He kissed her once, it appeared, when they were diving together, and she asked him to "do it again, because it felt so queer." I didn't ask if he indulged her. He seemed to take the incident as a proof of Lalla-lalla-lalla's inherent harmlessness. Nothing ever meant anything to her, he said, any more than that did. She was just a very pretty girl, with not a quiet bone in her body, bobbing about and having the time of her life, and never thinking at all, not of anything or anybody—not even of herself—very much.

That was King's theory of her.

It was the party at the Flutterbies' that brought me to a kind of a mental crisis as to the place Mrs. Flutterbie is to occupy with me from now on; or, more correctly speaking, the place she is *not* to occupy.

Peter de Koven dined with us that night, and, as a natural consequence, we—Peter, King, and I—went together to the Flutterbies'. Almost as we entered the door of the drawing-room Mr. Flutterbie darted out from his wife's side to meet us. He's a rather nice man; not

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very sensible, though he can say most amusing things at times, and is good company. He is always beautifully dressed, neat to a fault; and he wears nice little whiskers, such as you might expect a lady to wear—if she wore them. He was not in the least a person who could be expected to control or develop a Lalla-lalla-lalla, provided there are depths there to develop. He rushed up to King and to me, and shook each of us by the hand effusively. He has always liked King—but then every one does—and I knew he had always liked Peter; still, I was not quite prepared for it when he clapped the latter on the shoulder and cried: “Why, why! You dear, old ruin! Where have you been keeping yourself? We haven’t seen you—not for a whole twenty-four hours!”

Is Peter de Koven a daily visitor at the Flutterbies’? That was news to me; but Peter looked so excessively silly under the onslaught I felt the soft impeachment was admitted. Mrs. Flutterbie overheard the whole occurrence, what there was of it, and, as she turned to greet us, I saw her glance at her husband—one of those murderous, marital looks that mean nothing at all. They are perfectly congenial, and very fond of each other. It was just here, and

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at that moment, the whole little episode of the evening, if I can call it by so serious a name, started. It gathered volume from then on.

The next incident was when I asked Mrs. Flutterbie if I might telephone home to speak to my nurse, for I was a little anxious over one of the twins, who was coughing in that croupy kind of way, as children so love to just as you are leaving the house.

Mrs. Flutterbie showed me the way to the telephone herself, in the most gracious fashion; and there, while she still stood beside me, I saw—it was impossible to help seeing it—one of those little tacked-up lists of the telephone numbers one constantly uses. The list was in Mrs. Flutterbie's print-like handwriting; and the last name on the list, added in pencil, was Peter de Koven's. And she saw that I saw it.

Up to that moment there had been nothing obvious to me but a rather uncomfortable, indefinable something in the air; from then I began to understand what that something might be, and what it was that Mrs. Flutterbie was determined to do.

I read a charming story the other day of a dear old man who never had harmed any one in the world, but in the course of an analysis

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he was making of the motives of the villain of the story, he remarked calmly that he was able to understand him so well because—"me, I am that kind of a man myself."

Having writ down Mrs. Flutterbie as I have at the outset, it may seem extraordinary that I should be willing, as did the old man of the story, to admit that I so well understood what was in the mind of my hostess, because—"me, I am that kind of a woman myself." John Bunyan knew what I meant.

"There, but for the grace of God, goes John Bunyan," he said, on viewing an obvious son of Bacchus.

Given a little vivacity, with no particular sense of restraint, and some chance for practise, almost any woman might make up into a more or less successful understudy of Mrs. Flutterbie. There are dozens and dozens of these cheap imitations of her type; but not so very many of the type itself. There is no temptation whatever to a spirited woman of average intelligence to try to model on these cheaper followers; but I submit that there are few women of lively temperament who have not felt, at some period of their lives, the call to lay aside the sobering restrictions, the hamper-

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ing conventions, and, with Mrs. Flutterbie's own gay-minded type, go, as light-heartedly, a-fishing. It has its own call, that same going a-fishing—especially for those who have wit enough to be quite aware that it takes brains, and something more, to fish—as the real type fishes. There, but for one grace or another, any one of us might go, over the hills and far away, where freedom, of its kind, lies; where restraints are not, and where the very atmosphere of utter intoxicating thoughtlessness is in itself a temptation. With how many of us (as we look back we know it is so) it has been simply a question as to which had the deeper hold on us, this call of the *wanderlust* or some saving grace—a grace of more sensitive choice, of taste, of influence, of a mere chance word, perhaps, that drew us back and sobered us.

But this is not Mrs. Flutterbie's party, where, through some common kinship of the mind, it was very soon made clear to me (what was the animus provoking her!) that Mrs. Flutterbie had set her lance in rest, and was tilting against me in a duel, as though I had received and accepted her challenge. She was determined—I saw this plainly—that Peter de Koven should that night pose as her devoted attendant.

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As to Peter—that worried me not at all. He can choose to do whatever he pleases; and he is quite old enough to take care of himself, to get into scrapes, and get out of them; but when I suddenly became aware of Lalla-lalla-lalla's full intentions—namely, that Peter and *King*, my two escorts, should *both* pose as constantly hovering about her, then—

King!

For the first moment I was too astonished to quite believe it; the next moment—I never was so angry in my life.

To do them justice, King and Peter, too, acted throughout like the gentlemen they both are. A man is rather defenseless against his hostess, or any woman who selects to delight to publicly honor him; but now and again each of them would briefly extricate himself, and come wandering back to me to learn if I “wanted anything.” It was not hard to see into what a vulgar little warfare this performance could quickly degenerate, and one perfectly obvious to every woman in the room—it is unlikely that the masculine element would have so quickly understood it.

Almost in spite of myself, I found that it might most easily happen that I would be ap-

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pearing to set up something like my little court at one end of the drawing-room, while Mrs. Flutterbie presided, in opposition, over hers at the other end of the room. If, so I instantly decided, my hostess imagined for a moment that I would thus enter the lists against her, or accept her challenge in any sense, she was never more mistaken in her life. As I look back on it I am forced to admit, and I see the humor of the confession, that in spite of this decision, what I did was to at once take up her challenge. The moment I clearly saw what she meant me to see, I lifted the gage, however unconsciously—only I chose my own mode of warfare, which was not hers. Apparently, to me, all that I did was to immediately decide *to go home*. It is hard to construe such a complete retreat into a going out to meet the enemy—yet that is often the quick road to victory. I forget the excuse I decided to make to Mrs. Flutterbie. I was not particularly interested in what she might think or say.

I beckoned to King, and to him I merely stated that I thought I wanted to leave. He was quite willing. Peter de Koven was standing near us at the moment, but he did not overhear what was said.

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We were detained on our way to bid Mrs. Flutterbie good-night—my husband and I—by Sweetie van Rustle's prosy old father, who had been discussing household management—I think it was—with me, and who wished to finish some history, in which he had been interrupted.

"My second wife," he said, "a most estimable lady—"

Fancy talking in that way of the wife of your bosom!

But he was not destined to end his story that night. Just then Peter came up to us again, and spoke to me hurriedly, in a lowered voice.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," he said, "but you have been called to the telephone by your nurse. She says the child's not ill at all, and there's no cause for you to be uneasy—"

I think it took me just two minutes to clear the stairs, to fall into my wraps, and be out into the street. There were no adieus made to Mrs. Flutterbie! King was flying along to keep pace with me; and while we were rushing down the avenue there came behind us the pat, pat, pat of feet, and there was Peter, all out of breath, following us.

"What in the world is the matter!" he cried.

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"Why are you tearing off like this? And from such a nice party, too! Didn't I tell you the nurse said the child was not ill at all?—that you weren't to be uneasy? I thought it was very nice and considerate of her to telephone. She wanted you to enjoy the party with an easy mind; and there you two go, charging out of the house—"

I stood still under the light of the street-lamp and looked at Peter—and then at King. King burst into a shout of laughter, and banged his fist into Peter's shoulder.

"Well," he said, "if you ever play me another trick like that—"

Peter turned to me, doubtfully. "I don't suppose you are going back. You won't be broken-hearted at leaving. I'll make your excuses—and stay it out. I guess that's rather wiser, eh?"

I made no reply whatever.

"Much wiser," said King. "Give my regards to her."

"Take them yourself," said Peter.

King and I walked on in silence.

"My dear," said my husband, presently, "what was the matter this evening? What was all this about?"

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Then I told him the history of the evening—what little there was to tell. I was ashamed as I tried to put it in words; it seemed such an uninteresting, cheap kind of a story; and so intangible, too, as one tried to make it into a history at all. It was a relief to me when King seemed to understand; there was no good reason that he should—not from what I told him.

"Yes," he said; "I see. You met it just the way I like to see a woman handle such things—turned it off easily—simply went home when you found it might annoy you."

"That was the way I felt," I said, gratefully.

"Not every woman has the courage to be simple—not in social matters," said King; and I could have embraced him, if it was on the street. In my heart I was saying (for too much spoken "praise to the face is open disgrace," I suppose): "Not every woman has such a husband to go home with."

I told him presently—what I had omitted before—of Peter's telephone number being on Mrs. Flutterbie's list.

At this he laughed aloud. "So!" he said. "There's the whole cat out of the bag. When

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Peter knows Lalla-lalla-lalla as well as I know her—I rather think he's got his eyes open, though. He told me to-night that he began to believe Mrs. Flutterbie was 'the kind of woman whom a touch of raciness did not improve.'"

"King!" I cried. "What a horrid thing to say about any woman! He shouldn't—"

"Oh, I don't know about that," said King.

"There's one thing certain," I said. "If that's the kind of *vicarious domesticity* you were talking about this morning—it's not the sort that a bachelor—not one as really nice as Peter—should enjoy. If a woman like Mrs. Flutterbie should get any real hold on him—he's so good-natured— He ought to settle down and marry! He really ought. I have a great mind to invite Patricia Golden to visit us. She is the sweetest woman—you know how dear she is. Peter de Koven always admired her. They were children together, yet he hasn't seen her for years. She would seem like quite a new story to him, with all the charms of an old one—don't you think so? And—"

"Subrikinque, Subrikinque, Subrikinque!" said King.

Then I knew that he and Peter had been

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laughing at me together and behind my back, for it was not I who had told King of Peter's nickname for me; it was certainly not I

"I don't care!" I cried, recovering spirit. "He ought to be married, and I think I shall write to Patricia to-morrow."

"Subrikinque!" repeated King.

IV

“FINISHED”



WANTED to ask if you have heard again from Daphne?”

“Yes. Dear little Daphne; she is so good about writing.”

“And what does she say?”

It was the children’s music-teacher questioning me. Miss Earnestine, we call her.

I fished about in my work-basket; for I am still silly enough to keep the letters of my first-born always somewhere near me, and produced Daphne’s last epistle.

“She writes very regularly,” I said. “It’s the one thing that her father made a kind of point of when she left us. He told her he was not asking for promises, but he’d like two home letters a week; ‘if it’s in the wood to do it,’ he said. That sounds just like him, doesn’t it? What are you laughing at, pray?”

This last was addressed to Peter de Koven,

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who was, I had supposed, reading the paper as he stood near the window, where he had retired when Miss Earnestine came in to talk to me.

"I was laughing at you," said Peter. "There never were such children in the world—were there? There never was such a husband and father! Mercifully, you don't stop there. As your mantle covers us all, we condone it. Miss Earnestine, I heard her telling a mother of seven children—possible pupils, you understand—that as a teacher, as a *remarkable* teacher, who simply *lifted* the children along, she could *truthfully* say that Miss Earnestine—"

"You shall not laugh at her!" cried Miss Earnestine. "If you could hear what she says of *you* behind your back, you wouldn't. You'd be overcome with confusion and repentance."

"Pray spare him, then," I said; but my mind was a little absent, for I was greatly surprised, not at what Miss Earnestine had said, but at her manner to Peter—and his to her. It was quite plain that she knew him familiarly. I had been about to introduce them when Miss Earnestine first came into the room.

"Here is Daphne's letter," I said; "I think you may both like to hear parts of it. She begins

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by telling me she believes she likes everything about the school; that she thinks it a good school, with one exception—all the girls have hats turned up differently from hers, and she'd like hers altered."

"Good gracious!" said Peter. "Our Daphne's gone! I thought she was nothing but a baby-girl. She was when she left here. That comes of sending her to one of those confounded finishing-schools. I told you and King how it would be. When she left here the child was perfectly content with any sort of a hat; with a preference for none at all. She kept hers on with an elastic under her chin. Just so long as a girl wears an elastic under her chin you've got your little daughter. The day she takes to hat-pins she's grown up. Poor, poor little Daphne! Well, you and King can remember—I told you so. Does she call for hat-pins in this letter?"

"Oh, she called for them in her first letter home," I answered. "And, my dear Peter, calling the child *little Daphne* won't keep the years from passing. By-the-way, who was it that was laughing at me not long ago for calling her *little Daphne*? Who asked me why I didn't keep her in bibs and push her in a perambu-

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lator? Who said I'd be accused of not wanting a grown daughter—at my age!—if I kept on talking of a girl who is as tall as I am as if she were still in pinafores?"

"That's quite another thing," said Peter. "I maintain that I detest finishing-schools. I don't hold they create fools, but I do claim that they can develop one quicker than any other known process."

"Then Daphne's immune," said Miss Earnestine. "She was my brightest pupil."

"Pooh!" said Peter, scornfully. "Are you in the way of saying that to all mothers? Let me tell you, it's wasted ammunition here, for this lady already knows perfectly well that each of her children is the brightest child that any of their teachers ever taught—eh, madame? You'd think she might realize that children are no such rarity. Lots of people have them; not so many as she has, perhaps—but children aren't patented. Dear little Daphne; it was she who first introduced me to all that had happened in my absence, a very brief absence of mine abroad. I was only gone six years. I remember as if it were yesterday—I was walking across the fields, looking for this lady's country-house, when I ran

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on a small pond and a little bit of a girl being hauled out of a boat by a man—he seemed to be the gardener. She was crying with rage, and she was trying to scratch his face. That was Daphne. Sweet child! They'll take all that spirit out of her, every dash of it, where she is now. She wasn't *finished* when the gardener came up against her little projects. He plumped her down on the shore and looked at her.

"'You had ought to be spanked,' he said. 'You'll lose me me job yit. Git along home wid ye!' And then he headed her toward what I supposed was her home; and she set off as hard as her chunky little legs would go, howling—how she did howl! Whose child she was, where she was going, was perfectly plain to me. I caught up with her; and, sure enough, she led me where I wanted to go—straight to her nursery. 'You don't tell me all these children are your brothers and sisters!' I said.

"'All—but about two,' says Daphne, coolly. Now, that's the correct, casual way to regard children."

"'You never told me a word of any of all this!' I cried.

"'I didn't know you quite so well just then—

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you remember I'd been six years abroad. I wasn't sure how you'd take it—my recognizing your offspring on sight. It wasn't as if I could say her charming visage betrayed her origin. It was her little winning ways I recognized. Do you remember one day—when we were children—and you got furious with me, and—”

“Do you want to hear Daphne's letter?—or don't you?” I asked.

“I'm not particular about it,” complained Peter. “I can tell you what it contains without hearing it—another good little girl gone wrong; and all because her parents would not listen to the advice of their best and oldest friend.”

“What *are* you talking about!” I cried. I really was half-annoyed. It had been so hard to decide to send Daphne away. “I have no recollection of your making any remarks as to Daphne's going to boarding-school. You speak as if King and I had consulted you, and then gone in direct opposition to your advice, whereas, so far as I know, the subject was never once mentioned in your—”

“Bang! Whack!” said Peter. “Did you hear my bones rattle on the floor, Miss Earnestine? That's the kind of treatment an old

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bachelor gets. Well, those remarks are what I *would* have said if my opinion had been asked. We'll leave it that way."

As he turned to Miss Earnestine it seemed to me that his eyes dwelt approvingly on her. She is not precisely beautiful, yet she has—beauty. Character, industry, pluck—all these one might expect as the product of the life she has had to lead. The unexpected in her is an air of elegance and delicacy—qualities widely different from the grim front that so many women present who have to be self-supporting. She knows how to walk, too, and holds herself quite wonderfully when she is not too hurried or too overtired.

I thought I could see that Peter, as he stood watching her, detected all this in her, as I did. I kept pondering, too, where and how they had come to know each other so well as they evidently did. He liked to talk to her, to look at her while she talked. I knew that Miss Earnestine lived in a wee apartment, keeping up a kind of bachelor-girl light housekeeping; but I knew nothing of the details of the ménage. For a girl of her age she had seen much of life, and she had of necessity led a rather Bohemian existence. Why was the bloom not

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brushed from her? Trained elegance of carriage, gesture, and speech I had not customarily found in bachelor-girls. They were *freer* in all respects; less conventional in gait, in air. What was it that had so conserved in busy, hard-working Miss Earnestine this delicate physical expression?

Suddenly I recognized the hall-mark—and could not imagine why I had not identified it earlier. I was sure that she had been educated by a dear old lady principal in a fashionable finishing-school. It's a type by itself; and the stamp, once set, is never lost.

Whenever I have seen Miss Earnestine hold herself what we women call "below her looks," it was always plainly due to an unhappy over-fatigue—a physical let-down. If she had not worked so hard, she would always bear herself to perfection. With more leisure, or if, for instance, she should marry a man somewhat older than she, she would soon learn to lean on him, and look up to him, and then—

I wondered again how much she and Peter were seeing of each other.

With all this passing through my mind, I was so absorbed that I started when Peter

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turned to me and said: "Well—and what do you think of that?"

I had to admit that my thoughts had been far, far away. (And yet not so very far away either, if I had told them the truth.) Miss Earnestine leaned over and lightly touched my hand in her pretty, gentle way.

"You never have Daphne quite out of mind, do you?" she said. "I often think that children little know how near their mothers always are. I think"—she hesitated charmingly—"I think that kind of nearness takes care of them, too, in absence—don't you?" She spoke nicely, not sentimentally; the manner is everything.

I felt like a hypocrite. I had forgotten all about Daphne! I couldn't possibly say so under the circumstances; and I murmured something — silly enough it sounded, too — about mothers and children. I did not dare to look at Peter. But when I did glance at him, I believed that I need not have troubled myself; it seemed apparent that he was not thinking about me at all. So far as he was then concerned, I might just as well have said "chops and tomato sauce," and escaped criticism. He was still looking at Earnestine.

"I was trying to tell you," he explained to

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me, "that Miss Earnestine is an authority on many subjects. The next time you ask me to supper, madame, if you will invite Miss Earnestine also, and ask her to broil for us some English mutton-chops, I'll engage to dispose of—how many did I eat of our last broiling, Miss Earnestine?"

I hoped that I did not speak too eagerly as I named the night for Miss Earnestine to broil chops for us, and assist, with Peter, in their consumption. I was becoming a little better acquainted with the details of the ménage of the wee apartment.

As she glanced up at me I abruptly asked: "You were educated—weren't you—at a—perhaps a rather old-fashioned—finishing-school?"

"How did you know?" asked Miss Earnestine. She looked at Peter. "You have been telling her my boarding-school stories!" she accused him.

Peter shook his head.

"No, *I* haven't—but *you* must."

Miss Earnestine blushed and looked doubtfully at me. I began to believe that those English mutton-chop suppers in the wee apartment must be interesting little affairs.

Embarrassed though she was, she did not

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need me to come to her rescue. As she sat there, quietly smiling and refusing to be "drawn out" for my benefit, she never once quite lost that little touch of dignity which forbade intrusion, and proclaimed her a woman of the world, wherever she found herself.

Yes, that's what the finishing-school teaches; and there only have I seen it learned. It may, later in life, be acquired by worldly experience; but, as a science, in its concentrated form, woman-of-the-worldness is assimilated with strange swiftness and permanence in the finishing-school proper, which claims to teach—just what it teaches. If I had wanted renewed assurance that we have built as we wished to build in sending our daughter to the school of our choice, here in Miss Earnestine was the indorsement.

When she was a small girl Miss Earnestine had never been allowed to forget that she was a "little lady." That fact had been so drilled into her that she *could* not now forget it. Of course, there are finishing-schools and finishing-schools—those that teach ideals and manners; others teaching manners only; others, again, that inculcate neither manners nor ideals.

Miss Earnestine had been educated in a

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school of the first grade. I was as sure of her ever-maintained dignity as if I had been present at each one of the little functions in the wee apartment.

As to the mental drill of finishing-schools, in making up our last music-lesson account I had asked Miss Earnestine to verify the statement. In order to do so it was, it seemed to me, necessary to multiply by twelve; but that was not the way she attained her result.

"I never could multiply by twelve," she said, serenely. "I'll multiply this by six, and then by two. I always do—it will be the same."

I am not maintaining that any finishing-school ever taught a pupil thus to arrive at the multiplication of twelve; but (as a generic term) I have to admit that the mental drill there enforced is not calculated to make the mind of the pupil retain, indelibly, multiplication tables. But there are compensations.

"I didn't have to be told that Miss Earnestine was educated by an old-fashioned lady principal," I said. "She has been taught, I can see that, exactly what I sent Daphne to boarding-school to learn. It's all very well to laugh at the old lady principals—Daphne's

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school has one—but they teach some things that a girl never loses afterward. Lady principals *enter a room*—they don't just *come in*. They know how to use a fan and a handkerchief; and how a lady should carry herself becomingly—under all circumstances. How she should sit in a chair; and walk; and even how she should talk—yes, they know! It seems utterly absurd as you watch the lessons—old-fashioned and ridiculous; but there *is* a grace; a something that comes; an emery-wheel polish; a diamond-dust finish—the result is perfectly beautiful, I think."

"So do I," said Peter.

"I don't much care," I went on, "if Daphne doesn't learn anything else there. She's just a child still—one year without much book-study won't hurt her. She's been growing too fast, and—"

"Oh, if you've sent her to school to rest her mind, I've no more to say," said Peter. "I misunderstood the case. I'll open the door for you, Miss Earnestine, if you must go."

"You won't forget our mutton-chop supper engagement, Miss Earnestine?" I said. It seemed to me that I couldn't remember when I had grown so quickly to like a girl so well.

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I wanted to see more of her—much more of her.

"I'll see that she remembers," said Peter.

I could hear them in the hallway, still talking and laughing together at the front door. One might think that Peter de Koven wore a kimono! He can keep more information concealed up his sleeve than any one I ever met. He never had mentioned Miss Earnestine's name to me.

"That's the kind of woman I like," I said to him, when he came back into the room. "She is so hard-working, so overworked, yet always dainty, too; did you notice her gown, her hair—everything? I don't see how she retains her fastidiousness, busy as she is. She's what I told you—the finishing-school type. The finish is hard to lose. I can't imagine anything which I would enjoy more, if I were only in a position to do it, than to give that girl the kind of life for which she's so suited. It wouldn't spoil her, either—not a bit. See how she's kept the best of her lost prosperity in her poverty—she'd do just the same the other way round."

"Yes," said Peter, "she would. She's fine—gallant." He was, as if unconsciously, jingling

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his watch-chain as he talked. He has not yet untied that knot in it, impudently placed there by him to remind him that it was time he married. "I've seen a great deal of her of late. If I had to choose a good comrade, fine and true from head to foot, and jolly as the day is long, I'd say—Miss Earnestine. She's always just as you see her. She's a good fellow—the best I know." Then he took up his neglected paper and suddenly retired behind it, leaving me to my cogitations.

A good fellow!

That's not the way a man talks of the woman he's thinking of as—as something quite different. I was too disappointed to do or say anything. I merely sat and sewed. Suddenly a queer little sound made me look up to see Peter's paper shaking as if an earthquake were under it.

"What *is* the matter?" I asked. At which he dropped his paper and disclosed a face red and distorted by suppressed laughter. He looked at me in silence—he could not speak.

"What is it?" I repeated, but rather weakly. I was not unprepared for the reply, when Peter, openly rocking in his chair and wiping the

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tears from his eyes, gasped out: "I—I was only thinking, dear Subrikinque, how hard—how full of disappointments, of withered hopes, must be—the—the career of a"—he choked again—"a born Subrikinque."

V

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THERE is nothing quite like remembrance; it is the one thing which we have, we older ones, that youth has not. The young do not envy us, for they know nothing of a joy that they have never tasted, and to youth, in its mighty activity, *remembering* seems an unprofitable, an unexciting pastime. Why should they sit in the sun and think? No, they have too much to do, they tell us; and so they have. It is for them to act; for us, who have acted, to dream of what we have done and seen, and—taught through our own experience—watch, with opened eyes, the experiences of others. Wait, dear children, until your activities land you—God knows where! To whom then do you turn for rescue? To the chimney-corner where grandfather sits *remembering*, seemingly past active service. He listens, half smiling, to your story. Ah yes, he,



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too, in his heyday made that self-same mistake, fell into this same trouble. The way out? Certainly he will show you a way out. He rises as he speaks. Then it is that imitative youth receives its first lesson in growing old, and in the days to come will "remember" how one should rise from a chimney-corner and just how youth should be led calmly and safely out of the turmoil. The chances are that the exit will be by one of the very posterns through which the octogenarian was himself rescued many years ago; led, in turn, by his grandfather. So it goes. There is nothing new under the sun; and tradition taught, tradition teaching, we pass the sagas down.

No, there is nothing quite like it. Take my word for it, there are few things on earth so useful, so fascinating, as this habit of "remembering." As to excitement—the sport of fox-hunting pales before the enthusiasm of a "still-hunt" in which two—or maybe three—old friends, sitting together, run to earth from the lives they once lived in common all kinds of tag-ends of memories. What one cannot remember the other does recall; then comes the joy of making an old friend live over again what has been forgotten. Hooked up there

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somewhere, back in the recesses of these cast-iron memories of ours, with touch by touch of loosening reminiscence, down it rattles at last in our midst, where all of us fall upon it, each one now remembering all about it.

I talk as if I were a hundred years old, and had been "remembering" for a generation. As a matter of fact, I speak with such enthusiasm because I have only now discovered this possible delight of increasing years. I, too, have supposed that in youth and action lay the juices of life. I have just learned what pleasures may lie awaiting me as I *age*.

I don't mean to age very fast; but I have always wanted to grow old, not only gracefully, but with a kind of inspiration. I see my way to this end as never before. The *joys of retrospection* have suddenly unrolled before me.

It does not sound especially wifely, but if I must tell the truth, I believe that this new outlook on life would never have come to me if I had not been briefly separated from my husband. King was not connected in any way with my childish days. I never met him until I was old enough to be married to him; my life with him is very much in the present. Suddenly, unexpectedly, I found myself back,

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back in the past. I learned what the past may come to mean to me in my future—my past childhood, my past middle life and, if it so happens, even my past old age.

I was quite tired, or King thought that I was, and we had a new cook. "Here you've invited Patricia Golden to visit us," said King, "and I know just what will happen. You'll be entertaining all the time, and the new cook will 'go.' Moreover, she is only a good plain cook as yet, and the kickshaws that Patricia Golden is used to are not in her line. Why don't you invite Patricia to stay at the seashore for a little holiday with you? You need a rest and you need a change. I want you to do it."

Of course I vowed I wouldn't think of such a thing—and then I went; and down at the bottom of things the real reason I finally consented was that I was ashamed to tell Peter de Koven that Patricia Golden was coming to visit us. I had grown to feel a little foolishly conscious, and conscience-stricken, too, over that knot in Peter's watch-chain. I heartily wished that he would untie it, yet I didn't quite like to ask him to do so. I knew just what Peter would suspect when he learned that

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Patricia had been asked to visit us. If he did not say *Subrikinque*, he'd think it. The worst of it was he would be thinking only the truth.

When I wrote to invite Patricia, it certainly was in my mind that she and Peter—perhaps I didn't go quite so far as to deliberately intend—I don't know just what I did mean to do; but whatever it was, I had grown as uncomfortable as meddlers do grow to feel, and I wished I had not asked Patricia to come to us. She is not in the least a person one would care to take liberties with. I felt I had, in my mind at least, taken a liberty of a kind with her. It was a distinct relief to me to think of entertaining her elsewhere than at home. The end of it was that here we are, Patricia and I, having a reminiscent, school-girl kind of a time together, in a pleasant little hotel, far enough south to make life in the open air and on the beaches quite like summer life, even at this season. We have adjoining rooms, and we brush our hair together every night, and we are renewing our youth in various similar ways. If I only had King and the children here, or one of the children—but King would not hear of any such plan. He wanted me to 'forget I was married,' he said,

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and come home to him a girl again. To-day he sent me a copied recipe for making currant jelly. He added a word to inform me that I had been promised a home letter every day, but he thought the enclosed better for me than too many domestic details; it was more restful. There was certainly nothing exciting in the recipe.

I showed this epistle to Patricia, and she looked at it and then at me, and laughed. "*That* is being married, isn't it?" she said, quizzically. I don't know what she meant, and didn't like to ask; but I put King's letter away and said no more.

Once, years ago it was, I had ventured to mention to Patricia that it had always seemed so odd to me that she was not married. She didn't answer me for a moment, and then she only laughed and said, easily, "*It is odd—isn't it?*" But in that instant, before she replied, I had time to be sorry, so sorry, that I had said any such word. The strangest look had passed—no, *rippled*—over her features. It was barely a flash, as she is so self-controlled, but it told me to hold my tongue concerning something which I did not in the least understand and had no right to speculate upon. If she has a story—

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it is hers. She is not the kind to share it. We have known each other forever; but I am not Patricia Golden's confidante. I feel she keeps her own counsel—that she has no confidantes, and needs none. She has been living abroad for years, quite independent of her family.

It seems odd, but I have yet to meet the woman who went to school with a girl *younger* than herself. "Yes, indeed," such is the way we usually express it. "Yes, I remember her perfectly. She was the dearest girl! We went to school together. I was one of the *little* girls, and I can remember how admiringly I looked up to her." I hope that this formula, when used, is in every case as strictly true a statement as it is of Patricia and me. I *did* go to school with her, and she *is* older than I. But what constitutes a great difference of age for schoolgirls is a negligible quality later in life.

Patricia is now what Peter de Koven would call "our age." If there is any difference between us, which I sometimes doubt when I look at her, any casual observer would say that the advantage was in Patricia's favor. I don't think that she looks a day above twenty-five, certainly not when, as now, she is wearing her out-of-door costume. She dresses quite

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superbly at other and more formal times. Why shouldn't she? If she chose to dress in spun gold and diamonds, she would still not be dressed out of keeping with her fortune; yet Patricia is quite unspoiled by her wealth, and she seemed to be enjoying life with me, in our quiet, simple hotel. There has, so far, been nothing particularly exciting here to record; what there may be now to chronicle I cannot pretend to say, for what was, to me, a most astonishing feature suddenly dawned upon our horizon.

I was walking through the hotel corridor looking for Patricia when I heard her voice outside of one of the long windows that open from the parlor to the porch, where early roses are climbing on the wooden posts.

"The roses," Patricia was saying. "Yes, they are charming, aren't they? Certainly you shall have one—two, if you like."

"Haven't you a pin?" said another voice. I stood perfectly motionless, rooted to the floor.

"No, I haven't a pin—none I can spare," said Patricia, in her cool, easy tones, yet always warm enough to be ever so pleasing. "Could you use a hair-pin?"

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"Just like a woman!" laughed the other voice.

"What do you expect me to be like—a man? Here's an invisible hair-pin."

"An *invisible hair-pin!*" retorted the voice—I stepped softly to the window and looked out. There, in a rose-screened angle of the porch, stood Péter de Koven. Patricia, with a fine wire hair-pin, was attaching a rose to the lapel of his coat!

The cooling and harmless drink of the region, the blood-colored sangaree, stood in a glass pitcher, frosted by ice, on a small table under the roses of the porch. It was a pretty scene: the red pitcher, the red sangaree-cups, the red roses, the bright sunshine filtering in through the rose leaves. I looked across the table at my two old friends, and as the minutes slipped by and by, and we sat chatting, chatting, I thought that if only King had been there there could have been nothing more to wish for in that hour.

"No more for me, thank you," said Patricia, holding her sangaree cup out of harm's way.

"Oh, just a wee nippie," urged Peter.

"It will go to my head," protested Patricia.

"Where do you want it to go?" said Peter.

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"What are you taking it for? I heard such a nice old lady this morning raking her waiter over the coals for watering her mint-julep. 'Don't put water in my julep!' says she. 'The ice will melt soon enough.' When you are in Turkey, do as the turkeys do."

"Bosh!" said I. "You might as well expect King's recipe for currant jelly to go to your head. This isn't much more than pink water. Fill our glasses. We will tak' a cup o' kindness to Auld Lang Syne."

Peter lifted his sangaree-cup and we all touched glasses across the table.

"To Auld Lang Syne, my dears; to Auld Lang Syne," said Peter. "We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet for Auld Lang Syne."

Then we drank silently, and not without real feeling.

"Do you remember—" began Patricia, presently. Every other sentence we spoke began the same way.

"Remember!" repeated Peter, gazing at her sentimentally. "Haven't I been trying, all these years, to forget?"

"You dear old humbug!" said Patricia. "You haven't changed a particle, have you? Do you remember—"

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"Of course I remember," said Peter. "Is there anything I forget—anything that happened way back there? When King told me that you two girls were down here—together, I stood it as long as I could, and then—I didn't try to stand it. I came. I knew just what was going on. '*Don't you remember—?*' '*Do you remember—?*' Hasn't this been a great reunion?"

He pause , and then—

"Tell the truth, both of you," he cried, suddenly. "Have either of you had such a grand good time in years? What we might like, if anything could make us happier, would be to see some old playmate walk in—Jasper, good old Jasper, perhaps, or Sarah Stillwater. You can meet and you can love all kinds of people, in all kinds of places, but when all is in, girls, there's no friend like the old friend. No one understands some things quite as the old friend understands. The lady here, she has a husband who—but we *all* know what she thinks of him; yet she doesn't want him here, not now! He can't '*remember.*'"

"I don't want King here now!" I interrupted. "What are you talking about? The one thing I do want, the only thing, is—" My words

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died away. I sat with my fingers twisted about the handle of my sangaree-cup. My eyes fell, and I felt my face redden. With a rush the truth came to me. No, I didn't want King there with us! No, I didn't want him at all. He couldn't have enjoyed it—we could not. Our present was stealing intimacy from an old and past familiarity.

Any presence here, however dear to one or two of us, if unfamiliar to our common past, must be alien to this atmosphere of our childhood which we had summoned so vividly from the vasty deeps of memory.

Words from my husband's last letter came back to me. I had not understood what he meant as I read them; now I knew. I had written, begging him to join us, if only for a few days; but his reply had been the frank statement that he "*could* come — but *would* not."

"Renew your youth," he had repeated. "Those two down there will teach you some things I know nothing about."

So this was what he had intended! And yes—he was right. I was learning to go back, to live in the past, as only my dear old play-mates could teach me to return. I had been

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so busy, so engrossed in the wealth of my present, the riches of memory were hid from me. I re-discovered the past excitedly; crowded, golden! How could I have forgotten so much that was invaluable? By reason of this reunion my own childhood was vividly restored to me, and thus all childhood would be the better revealed. I had thought I was a good, patient mother, but—heavens!—did my parents have to endure all from me that Peter and Patricia were claiming they have to put up with?

Can it be that this is in part what old friends are for? Are they meant, not merely to be loved and cherished, but also to be utilized as “domesticated recording angels” warranted to make us remember the errors of our youths, our innocent frolics; keeping us tender toward the duplicated departures of later generations?

Then, too, who but an old friend dares to talk to us with that intimate—not to say brutal—candor which, as the dignities of age hedge us about, we can hear from no other lips? The old friend shows us no respect whatever—and how pleasant and *young* we feel when disrespectfully handled. Also— isn't it salutary? I was learning fast and faster. No,

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I didn't want King here with us—not yet. I wanted nothing that might break a charmed day-dream in which my power to *remember* was stimulated to a point that bewildered me.

All the while that I was thinking these thoughts, I was still greedily listening to the running fire of *remembering* that Patricia and Peter kept up as fast as each of them could talk, drifting now and then into the frankest and most personal banter on present-day events.

"How long has it been since we three were together?" I broke in.

"Don't!" cried Patricia. "You married people are so merciless. We poor unmarried ones, Peter and I—we are sensitive about dates." She didn't care a pin really, and showed she didn't.

"Fiddlesticks!" I answered. "Neither of you care. I wish you did. *I* care, because I have some one to keep young for. When I see the tiniest wrinkle trying to creep in—or a gray hair—it worries me."

"Yes, it does," said Peter. "Her daughter Daphne has told me of those 'hare-hunts.' It's a serious mistake—this having children old enough to talk. They tell—they tell everything."

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"*Hare-hunts!*" repeated Patricia. "What is a hare-hunt?"

"Ask her," said Peter.

"Ask him," I retorted. "He seems so informed." (How angry I should have been had any one else so jeered at me!)

"It's like this," said Peter. "You let down your hair, sit in front of a mirror, and your two oldest children stand on little footstools on either side of your chair; each child has a small pair of scissors, with which they carefully cut out every gray hair as they find them. That's what is called a hare-hunt."

"Is it a hare-hunt when you haven't any children and have to do it for yourself?" asked Patricia.

Peter looked at her reproachfully. "You don't mean to tell me—" he said.

"I do," answered Patricia, coolly. "It isn't that I mind the gray hairs—but I can't bear to watch them. It discourages me. I haven't seen either of you since I went abroad—ten years ago. It's awful when we begin to talk in decades."

"What's the odds?" said Peter. "Here we are—together again—just so much older, but each of us very brave about it. Why should

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we grow older? We don't have to. It's not the fashion to be old any more. Teeth used to fall out and eyes fall in—it's not done now."

"I miss those dear old ladies," said Patricia. "Where have they all gone? I looked forward to sitting in the chimney-corner some day, knitting—knitting and uttering phrases, and calling everybody 'my dear.' I never shall."

"Do begin now!" said Peter, with interest.

Patricia took no notice of him.

"I met such a dear old lady out walking on the beach yesterday," she said. "She was eighty years old if she was a day. She had perfectly white hair—and no hat on her head! I've got over the shiver at seeing old ladies wear hats in place of bonnets, but I can't get used to them *bareheaded*. When it comes to gray hair trowsled in the breeze—"

"I know just how you feel," I said. "We were brought up in our day to reverence gray hairs—weren't we?"

"Your own—or those of some one else?" queried Peter. "What about those hare-hunts?"

"My old lady," went on Patricia, "was wearing a short walking-skirt—very short. She mentioned it to me. 'You see, I don't have to

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be troubled with holding this skirt up,' she said. I almost answered that I thought she might be exercised in holding it down—but I didn't say so."

"Ahem!" coughed Peter. "At what age is it proper to cease wearing short walking-skirts?"

"Really, I don't know," said Patricia, impartially.

She glanced down at her own short skirt. "It's quite an art," she said, "at our age, to dress so as not to be kittenish, and yet not to be elderly, either. It's a line you can't learn of your dressmaker—nor"—she looked steadily at Peter—"of your tailor. I've seen," she went on, "some men who at—at—say thirty-five—or forty, is it?—dressed as kittenishly as some women of that same youth—or age—or middle-age, or whatever you are pleased to call it."

She glanced Peter over critically. "You," she admitted, generously, "always were apt to be the best-dressed being in any room you entered; but, if I may venture, why is your watch-chain worn in a coquettish little snarl? It has worried me ever since you came here. If you can't untangle it—let me try."

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She stretched out her hand—such a pretty, white, slim hand.

The last thing one would expect to embarrass some friend is the little foolish shaft before which he goes down. It surprised me to see Peter flush slightly, and then, as if protectingly, he fingered that annoying knot. I sat looking down into the glass I held.

When we were all very young together, Peter and Patricia had been the best kind of friends—sometimes, even then, I had wondered if there might ever come to be any closer tie between them. Now, as Peter waited there, his finger on the knot, I felt my heart beat fast and hard suddenly. Had I builded better than I knew, inviting Patricia to visit me?

The silence grew strange, embarrassing. "But this isn't a snarl in my watch-chain," said Peter, presently. "It's — ask the lady, here," he laughed, recovering his spirit. "Ask this lady what it means when a man carries a knot in his watch-chain. She may answer you that it merely means he needs a Subrikinque; but, then, you still can ask her what a Subrikinque means."

"A Subrikinque!" repeated Patricia. "What may that be?"

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"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" I cried. "See what I have done!"

The contents of my glass of sangaree ran over the little table.

"How *could* I be so careless!" I cried.

Peter looked at me oddly. He showed no interest in the catastrophe, while Patricia helped me to mop up the red rivulets.

"We have talked of old friends," he said, "and we have all three agreed that nothing takes their place. Now, what about old loves? Sometimes I wonder if there is any love in life like what ripens from the little sweetheart loves of childhood. Think what they have to 'remember' together! An old love—it's an old glove to your hand, an old shoe to your foot. You think that it is all over and forgotten—some foolish quarrel has parted you, perhaps. You meet again, and suddenly—"

He paused and sat looking straight at Patricia.

I am not lacking in self-control, and I have some courage, but it really seemed to me as if I could not sit there and hear an offer of marriage made right before my face. Subrikinque I may be, but some sense of decency I have. I could not upset my empty sangaree-cup over

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again, so it was only left for me to rise, with some kind of a trumped-up excuse, and vanish. This was what I was about to do when Peter took out his watch to glance at it, and to exclaim at the lateness of the hour. He walked quickly to the steps of the porch, and, shading his eyes in his hand, looked out toward the hill behind which the sun was just about to set.

"Come," he said, turning back to us. "We've had our cup o' kindness. What do you two say to one of our old handicap walking-races? Patricia, I'll give you the same old five-minute start you used to have, and then beat you, walking to that summer-house up on the hill. The lady here, she could always walk faster than you. We will give her her old three-minute handicap. Will you race, girls?"

"Yes," said Patricia. She rose, as if glad to move. Something in her face caught my attention. I turned and looked again at Peter. Yes, yes, I was not fanciful; there was some deeper feeling here, evident with them both. Was it earnest, then—this meaning talk of old days, old loves? Was it possible that some foolish, foolish quarrel had separated these two—and now— I made up my mind quickly. I would not say so, not yet; but I did not intend

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to enter that handicap race. Patricia was already off, looking back, laughing, and waving her hand to us as she hurried away down the gravel walk and toward the summer-house on the distant hilltop. I looked up at Peter. He was following her with his eyes, and with a tenderness in his face that he seemed to make no effort whatever to conceal.

"I—I—think I'll go and—and lie down," I said. "I'm a bit—a bit tired. I think I won't race—not to-day."

"Nor I," said Peter.

He was gazing up the hill toward the summer-house, and, following the direction of his eyes, I saw Patricia hurrying along the hill-path, but it was not Patricia Peter was watching. Walking toward the summer-house, by a second path that led windingly up from the cove below, was another figure—a man's. He was not walking as Patricia walked, quickly and strongly, but slowly, almost painfully, with pauses. There was something strangely familiar to me in his gait, his figure. I turned and looked at Peter. He stretched out his hand and laid it on my arm as if to bid me be silent. His eyes still followed the two figures ascending their different paths, each

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unseen by the other—but that could not be for long. At the door of the summer-house the two paths met.

“He is staying at the little sanatorium across the cove,” said Peter. “I ran across him there—yesterday. I promised to meet him yonder in the summer-house at this hour—to watch the sunset with him. He wouldn’t come to the hotel—he avoids every one. He doesn’t know—I didn’t dare tell him that you and Patricia were here.”

“It’s not—is it—Jasper?” I whispered.

“Yes,” said Peter. “Patricia will meet him in a moment more, now, and then— It isn’t possible you haven’t known why Patricia has never married? There was a foolish, foolish quarrel, and in the rebound the other woman—there’s always one waiting—captured him.”

“But—but,” I cried, “his wife!”

“He is free. She will never trouble him again. The news came some months ago, he says. They have not seen each other for years, so he told me yesterday.”

“But he is ill—an invalid! He was not expected to live.”

“He didn’t want to live. He will want to—now.”

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I stood breathless, watching the two figures on the hill drawing nearer, nearer. When immediately opposite each other they each stood suddenly still, as if turned to stone.

Whether either of them spoke it was impossible to tell. There was no clasping of hands, no apparent greeting, but presently they both quietly moved, as if by common consent, to the ridge that overlooked the western slope, where they sat down on the grass, a little separated from each other, facing the sunset. It seemed to me that the whole world, with Peter and me, silently watched them, waiting. After a little while Patricia rose. She stood above Jasper, looking down on him, and then — we could see her plainly, and the gesture seemed to speak — she stretched out her hand to him, held it down to him, bending a little over him; he took her hand, was helped by it to his feet, and stood beside her. They turned and walked down the hill toward us. The two moving figures seemed as one against the sky-line. It was all over while you might have counted a few hundred.

"That's settled!" said Peter, and he sank back in his chair.

I turned and looked at him.

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"Yes," I said, and I spoke bitterly, for I love Patricia—and there were other reasons, too, why I felt desperately disappointed. "Yes," I said, "and that's the way it will always be, just as we saw it on the hill. Why shouldn't Patricia have some one who would lift *her* up—some one, good and kind and strong, some one whom we all know would make her happy; some one whom *she* could lean on, and—"

"Should he wear a knot in his watch-chain?" asked Peter, but I would not heed him.

"To wait all these years!" I cried; "to be all this while lonely, fretting her poor heart out—" I stopped suddenly.

Peter's fingers were on the knotted links in his watch-chain, and his eyes were set far off in the distance. My voice died lamely away. What was I saying to him? Who is it—who is it—that makes him unhappy?—our good, dear Peter! For he is sometimes unhappy. If it is Patricia—and yet he seemed only glad to think of Jasper with her.

"Patricia will soon have him on his feet," he said. "You'll see. They are sure to be happy. I can't expect you, madame, to agree with me; but the marriage of two old friends

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is, when all is said, with a few glorious exceptions, the solid rock to build on. That bond of childhood—what is there like it? How those two will help each other to *remember*—what neither should forget.

"It occurs to me," he added, his eyes filled with quizzical laughter at what he seemed to read in my face, "that for a Subrikinque in such pink of training you are sometimes a bit misled—eh? Wasn't there a moment when I distinctly detected, on your part, an effort toward propelling Patricia and your humble servant into a little tête-à-tête in that dove-cote summer-house up yonder? I thought you were a 'bit tired,' eh? Don't you 'feel like lying down'?"

I looked up the hill at the couple still slowly advancing. "You can't ever say Subrikinque to me again!" I cried. "Who was the Subrikinque there? Who did that?"

"I did," said Peter, stoutly. "And the only reason you are so disgruntled is because you had no finger in the pie."

"Subrikinque!" I retorted.

Peter rose. He stood bowing low to me, his hand on his heart—or where a man's heart should be. "I have qualified, ma-

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dame," he said, "under a so, so eminent teacher."

After all, it looks as if it were to prove a profitable vacation for the three of us. Patricia has found here—all that she asks for on earth, apparently. Peter de Koven has qualified as a first-grade Subrikinque. As for me, I have learned to pray a new prayer. From now, and all through my old age, and until death I shall use it daily:

"Lord, keep my memory green."

VI

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WHAT a cat I am!" said Patricia. "It's a dreadful thing to let yourself go and forget to be a lady." She was brushing out her long hair at the mirror as she talked.

"It's been very comforting to hear you," I answered, wielding my own brush. I was visiting Patricia in her adjoining bedroom.

"I've been coming up-stairs here alone talking to myself out loud, acting in the most unseemly manner, stamping my fist on my dressing-table, saying I would not stand her another day. It's the greatest comfort in life to have some one to say it to."

"And how discreet we both have been!" said Patricia. "Sara has been here a week now, and I didn't dream how you disliked her—until this moment."

"I can't endure her. You've done better

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than I have, though—you always speak to her in such a sweet, kind voice.”

“Most kind when I could bite nails,” confessed Patricia. “Do you really think that Peter—”

I shook my head.

“I don’t know. You wouldn’t believe a man as common sense as he is could be so taken in by—”

“Oh, that’s to be expected,” said Patricia. “That kind—a *dependent* woman—takes in any man. And they always marry—haven’t you noticed it?—such splendid, strong men. They have the best taste in men; they don’t want weak ones like themselves, they want *leaders*. They can ‘cut them out from the herd’ every time, too, men that would make such magnificent mates for—for women more like themselves. I suppose Sara’s first husband—there’s sure to be a second—was a *leader*. What do they see in her?”

“You can understand,” I said, “how the children might be a great temptation to Peter. They are adorable children.”

“They are!” Patricia admitted.

“Where *do* they get it?” I cried.

Patricia burst out laughing.

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"Gracious! We ought to be ashamed—at our age! But upon my word that woman would drive a saint to. . . . What do you suppose she said to me to-day? 'The children mind Peter the moment he speaks. They seem to understand he's their guardian. I don't know how I should ever have got on without him to help me with them. And he'll do anything for them—anything. He knows the way to my heart. To-day he actually—Tom always kicks me when I try to do it—he cut little Tom's finger-nails for me.' "

"Oh no!" I cried. "Don't!—well," I added, consolingly, "we may be thankful it wasn't little Tom's t—"

"It was!" wailed Patricia. "I didn't like to say it."

"Good-night!" I cried, gathering up my hair-pins. "I'm going to bed."

One week earlier than this conversation Patricia and I had come wandering down the hotel stairway together after dressing for dinner, at which dear old Jasper was to join us. He looks like a new man now, and grows stronger every day, and Patricia seems so radiantly happy I have become entirely reconciled to their engagement.

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Entering the parlor, we found, leaning against the frame of the window by which he stood, Peter. He was gazing out toward the veranda.

"I know to whom he is talking," said Patricia. "How dearly he loves children! Every child in this hotel knows him. He has one of the little girls out there now. He's particularly partial to little girls. Will you look at him! The air of a lover."

I looked and laughed. It is always amusing to see one-half of a picture. Peter, with a manner of the most absorbed and well-engrossed attention, was bending his head as if to listen the better.

As we moved forward the window suddenly framed the whole picture. On the veranda (I hadn't seen her since her marriage six or seven years earlier, but I should have known her anywhere) sat Sara Stillwater. She held on her knee the most beautiful little girl, who was looking right up into Peter's face. It was not at the little girl that Peter was looking.

"Heavens! Patricia! It's Sara Stillwater!" I whispered. I had stopped short, but Patricia, with her perfect tact, hurried instantly forward.

"Why, Sara!" she cried, beautifully cordial,

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equally non-committal. "Is it you? Did you know that we were here?"

"Yes," said Sara. She rose and greeted us, laughing like a girl of eighteen, and lifting her dark-blue eyes to Peter with that trustful look which only dark-blue eyes can give. What was there to be trustful about? "He was writing to me about the children," she said. "He was appointed their guardian when—when—you know! He wrote me that you were all here, Jasper too, and how it reminded him of the old days when we all played together. It reminded me, too—I was planning for a little trip somewhere, so I came here. I brought my little ones with me to show you. Come, children!"

And the children—a boy and a girl—were dears; beautiful little things, faces and bodies; and the worst little monkeys I ever met. If they had been good children I don't think I should have taken the matter so seriously; but bad, sweet, pretty little children were always a weakness with Peter de Koven, and Sara's children were just as bad and sweet and pretty as—as my own are.

"Why do they call you Tutie?" asked Peter.

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He was sitting on the porch, with Sara Stillwater's little girl on his knee. The little boy was perched on the edge of the porch. He answered for his sister.

"We call her Tutie because she's so tute," he said, solemnly. He can't quite manage his *c*'s yet, and it gives him the prettiest lisp.

I cannot remember, and I really don't like to ask Patricia if she recalls it, that Sara had any peculiarities of enunciation in earlier days. She has now—there are certain words with which she seems to find the greatest difficulty. Her lisp is fascinating, as pretty as is her little son's.

"The boy has his mother's eyes," said Peter. And he has—those same deep, dark-blue eyes, a delicious, melting blue—celestial, madonna, not a piercing blue. When the little fellow looks up at me so trustingly I understand perfectly why his mother's eyes seem irresistible to others. Woman as I am—and no woman is, in the nature of things, quite so appealing to her own sex as she may be to the sex opposite—Sara appeals to me. When she looks up at me with those blue eyes of hers, and asks my advice, as if I couldn't be wrong—and takes it, too—I can no more help giving her what she

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seems to need than I could refuse her pleading little boy. If I am thus moved by her, think what it must be when she asks advice of—some one who isn't a woman. Sara is one of those whose very touch is an appeal. Her hand clings to you—her mere contact leans on you. And—or so it has often appeared to me—the stronger the man the deeper the hold upon him of that kind of silly, befuddling fascination.

"Please won't you tighten up?" whispered the little girl. Peter had been holding her small hand in his while he talked to her brother.

He "tightened up" promptly—who wouldn't? If the boy has his mother's eyes, Tutie has her mother's manners.

It appeared that quite a little tragedy was afloat. Tutie had earned the right to sit by Peter at lunch. The child, who didn't fill its mouth to the limit, and then tamp the contents down with a spoon, sat, as reward, next to Peter during the following meal. Sara's efforts to instil table-manners had not been the most successful. She eats like a dainty butterfly herself. Tutie, having earned this privilege of place, had sold it to her brother for a banana,

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the which, having gone the way of good bananas, was unreturnable, though Tutie—lunch-hour approaching—was now tearfully regretting her bargain.

It was quite wonderful to see how Peter managed them. Had they been his own he could not have been more tender of them, and might very likely have been less wise. He was as firm with little Tutie, as determined that she should hold to her bargain, as if she hadn't Sara's manner. Having Sara's eyes did not protect her son from banishment to his room, when, a little later in the conversation, he told Peter a most deliberate fib.

"It's not a fib—it isn't," he maintained—"not when you say *Spider* under your breath. I did say *Spider*."

Really, he was the most fascinating and plausible little fellow. He took his medicine like a little man, too, when Peter dealt it out to him. By what right did Peter de Koven deal out any penalty to Sara's son? True, he was the children's guardian, but—most guardians are not quite so fatherly.

"Barring your own, did you ever see two such charming children?" asked Peter.

He was watching with a positively motherly

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regard the little girl, who had slipped down from his knee and was picking buttercups in the hotel yard.

I could not gainsay him. "I have been thinking," he went on, "whether Sara and the children ought not to be moved into the city, where I could see them oftener. Tutie hates her doll-babies. I caught her kicking her dolly in the mouth this morning—she said she was 'tired of seeing it smile.' That wasn't like a little girl. They are altogether too much for Sara. I overheard the boy telling Tutie to go 'beg' his mother for something. 'Cry and shake your frame,' he said, 'then she'll give it you.' The boy is quite beyond her. Yesterday she tried—she oughtn't to attempt it—to whip him." Peter laughed as if he couldn't help himself at the memory.

"Did she hurt him?" I asked, with a satire which I hoped was not too obvious in my voice.

"No! She spanked the air all round him with a clothes-brush, then she cried for an hour herself, poor girl. If the boy is spanked, he ought to be hurt."

"Why didn't you spank him for her?" I asked. I longed to add that it would have been less of a contract, as I viewed it, than

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some other and perhaps more delicate nursery services he had rendered.

"The child doesn't need spanking," said Peter.

"What does he need?" I asked. My heart sank as I awaited a reply to my reckless question.

"He needs," said Peter, slowly, as if unconsciously his hand moved to the knot in his watch-chain—"he needs, I suppose, me. I never have any trouble with him. I don't quite know how to decide."

"It's a serious matter," I said, desperately—"a very serious matter, this bringing up a ready-made family." Before I could repent my rashness, Sara came in sight, head bent, glancing from side to side as she came, in her endless, endless hunt for yellow buttercups. If I ever see another yellow buttercup! Sara wears them in her bosom, in her hair, carries them in her hand. She has the children trained to retrieve buttercups, and Sara welcomes each presentation with the same enthusiasm that so many gems might inspire. She has Peter gathering them for her, almost I find myself unable to pass a buttercup by the roadside—I have a guilty sense that I ought to pluck it for Sara.

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"I regard it as settled," I told Patricia. "When a man is seriously considering 'spanking' a woman's children for her, when we know he already performs other important domestic services, when, as a matter of fact, she and they really do *need* the man—obviously and desperately need him—I really think any gentleman would have to at least pause and consider his obligations. Their attraction for him is their need of him. They do need him."

I had always known, in an abstract kind of way, that there was for the normal man an extraordinary appeal in the widowed and the fatherless. I had understood, too, as a generalization, that the mermaid call was, in his ears, a faint echo beside the allurements of the widowed. *Why* these things should be had never been clear to me, as they were becoming with this close view of the situation—closer than I liked. Here was a complete family lacking only one element. The gap was so obvious, seemingly so simply remedied, it was not hard for me to appreciate (for I, too, have some sense of order and of economic values) how any practical, kindly man might, almost absent-mindedly, find himself stepping into that empty space. When the assumption of a little

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responsibility would so nicely return a forlorn little combination to balance proportions, it even might seem to a man of sensibility and imagination that he, as a duty, should admit this claim. But to those who look on, caring more for the rescuer than the rescued, there is a natural resentment in seeing demand thus draw supply unresisting into its vortex.

Something of all this I said to Patricia.

"Oh, come now!" said Patricia. "Sara herself is an attraction to be reckoned with. Perhaps she wouldn't be so bad—I really don't think she would — with a solid background. There are women who need a strong arm always around them. When they have it they do very well—well enough, anyhow. When they haven't it, they—they are Sara."

"I know," I agreed. "I will try to look at it that way and be reconciled—if it has to be. We loved her before—I suppose we can love her again."

"I'm not promising quite that," said Patricia. "I don't remember loving her before. We *played* with her, but I can't recall anything more fervent."

"Well, then, we'll play with her again," I assented, bravely. But, despite this resolve, I

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am free to confess that Patricia and I merely went on from bad to worse. We agreed that matters had quite reached a crisis, and that it was high time for us to be stern with ourselves on a day when Patricia caught me looking out of an upper window-blind, a slat of which I had stealthily opened, the better to observe the garden below, where there wandered a couple we both knew. The reason Patricia thus caught me—was because she was doing the same thing from a window above mine. At the click of her shutter I looked up, and our glances met. It might be questioned which of us caught the other; but when Patricia and I fell into each other's arms in the hallway a few moments later we could only cling together and rock and rock in helpless agonies of laughter. It was not the time to sort out the most guilty; both of us were behaving abominably, so we agreed.

"And," said Patricia, "we can't do a thing to prevent it. If he's going to marry her—if he likes her—why should we care?"

"Oh, I do care!" I cried. "I care awfully."

"So do I," confessed Patricia. "I think, after all—don't you?—her affected enunciation is the worst thing about her."

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"Her enunciation's not as bad as her buttercups," I grumbled. "She caught two hundred of them this morning."

"Deliver me," cried Patricia, "from the woman who carries a pet flower! It's worse than the kind that carries a pet perfume. If I have to see Sara pick another buttercup!—if I have to hear her talk again of buttercups!—if I ever have to admire another of her buttercups—"

"That's nothing," I interrupted. "I had to try if she 'loved butter' to-day. Peter held the buttercup under her white chin—it is a pretty chin—while I looked for the reflection. I could have boxed her ears."

"My dear," said Patricia, solemnly, "do you know what we are doing, you and I? We are losing our immortal souls—Sara's not worth them."

"You are a nice girl, Patricia. If we can't say nice things about Sara, I suppose we ought to agree to say nothing at all."

"Her feet are perfectly beautiful," stated Patricia, soberly.

I looked at her reproachfully. "Well, that's the nastiest thing I ever heard one woman say of another. If you can't do any better than that—"

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Just at that moment we heard Sara's voice in the adjoining hallway. She was talking to the proprietor of the hotel, who was evidently trying to keep his temper.

"They don't mind a word I say," fluted Sara. Her light, sweet voice, her childish enunciation, that cooing, cooing, cooing intonation were unmistakable. "I'll speak to their guardian; but I don't see how the little things could have done so much damage as you say. Children's little feet don't hurt the flowers—they make them grow."

"What are you going to do with any woman like that?" whispered Patricia, savagely. Apparently the proprietor knew no better than we, for he made no rejoinder.

"Oh, here's the children's guardian," said Sara, as if with his advent all her troubles were settled. Perhaps they were.

"What's up?" said Peter de Koven's voice—the tone of the man of the family on the scene.

Patricia and I looked mournfully at each other and silently stole away.

I don't know how to tell it. It seems unimaginable, impossible. How could such a thing

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happen? It was unthinkable. There was never anything tragic about Sara—and now— We watched her driving away from the hotel porch, Patricia and I, and how glad we were afterward to remember that we had said nothing, not even when we saw Peter lift her into the pony-cart, swing her up to the seat as if she were her own small daughter. I think we had both become sincerely ashamed of ourselves, and each determined to criticise Sara no more—for with no further agreement we had really ceased to talk of her.

We were never to have the chance again.

It all seemed so inadequate a machinery for such a tragedy—so helpless and unresisting a victim. The little pony was so small you could have pulled him in on the seat beside you, if you had any iron in your wrists. Sara had no strength in her hands—she never had.

She was to meet her children farther down the road, and take the little ones for a ride.

We never understood what happened. The children do not yet know that there was any accident. It was Peter de Koven who found her—he who first saw the little pony tearing back into the hotel yard with the wreck of the light carriage behind him. She had not suf-

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ferred, the doctors said. It was instant; but it was dreadful—too appalling to dwell on.

Sara, made regal, dignified, beautiful—at what a price!—lay—no, it is no story to tell.

We talked of it in whispers, Patricia and I. How Peter bore it, what he felt, we knew we had no right to wonder. Our conjectures never reached precise words. He took entire charge of everything—all responsibility for the children; but, being their guardian, he could do no less.

He telegraphed for Dr. Mary March, a distant cousin of Sara's. She came at once and took the children back with her to her own home, while we, Patricia and I, we—took Sara to her home.

The day after the funeral—Patricia had left us immediately after the services—Peter and I went to the church-yard, together, for the last time. Sara had been living in a village unfamiliar to us, but she had stayed there ever since her marriage, and was well known to them all. We were not sure of our way, as we had never been in the enclosure but the once before, and the last homes of those who choose them not are undistinctive.

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Suddenly, as we turned a corner, we both drew back a little and waited. We could see figures, natives of the town we thought, moving away from a newly made mound where they had been laying flowers.

"I don't think this is the place," said Peter, doubtfully. But as we drew nearer I stopped.

"Yes," I said, "this is it."

It was not by the location that I had identified the spot. Peter joined me, and we stood side by side looking down at a sprinkled arrangement of already wilting and futile little yellow buttercups. The effort to form them into some kind of a design, the utter failure to make them look adequate, to lend to the decoration any dignity, was, in its way, heart-breaking. We both had recognized the last resting-place of the playmate we had known so well, in all her little ways, her tastes, by a tawdry association that seemed so strangely consistent, so like her, and yet so—but why try to define it? Peter had in his arms a great box of loose, superb blossoms, which he had brought with him, I knew for what purpose. He made no motion now to open them, but stood looking down at the new-made grave stamped with, as it were, a kind of sign-manual, by these other friends

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of our playmate who, in her married life, had known her and learned her tastes, her preferences, as well, perhaps better, than we. Peter stooped and laid his hand tenderly on the earth, on the poor little wilting field-flowers. Why not? Why shouldn't he have loved her? They all had needed him—he was so tender when any one needed him; the children were very lovely, so temptingly sweet and naughty, and Sara—wasn't she Sara—and “to be reckoned with”?

“Dear child!” he said, softly. “Poor, poor little girl!” My heart gave a sudden great throb of relief. It was *pity*—it was only pity—it wasn't love, not love at all, that spoke in his voice. I knew him too well to be deceived. Furthermore, half unconscious as his accent was, there spoke in it a confidence, as if he were trying to tell me—not explicitly, for it was hardly so shaped in his own mind—that, had fate not interfered, he would have accepted this responsibility which lay so near his hand. He didn't love her, not in the least as a man should love the one woman. I believed, too, that her little ways, her buttercups and other trivial little habits were—not annoying to him as to Patricia and to me; but to a degree dis-

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pleasing, else why did he not lay the roses by the buttercups upon her grave?

Yet, in spite of everything, he would have married her. As surely as the sun orb takes "its path predestined through creation," he would have stepped into that empty place. Could I blame him? Being the man he was, placed as he was, he could have done no less. Yes, Death alone had saved him.

We left her there under the field-flowers and walked away from the graveyard together, in silence, with the box which Peter had brought with him still unopened under his arm, and the most sincere tears I had shed for Sara were raining down my face, tears that were partly gratitude to her, for I knew now, and beyond a shadow of doubt, that Peter had here no real grief to endure. The fear that he might have, the distress for him which had so hung over me, was forever gone.

Neither of us spoke on the way home—somehow I felt that Peter knew all that had been in my mind, and that he was, this time at least, if not fully understanding, at least in an attitude of sympathy with my past fears, my imaginations, my present relief.

Some parts of this experience of his I be-

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lieved I understand in ways which he did not quite realize. There were more lurking dangers in that menace which had threatened him than he himself could ever quite know.

VII

A BABY HOUSE-PARTY



WE had planned — King and I — a house-party for little Daphne in her Easter vacation, and had opened our summer home for the young people's entertainment. We looked forward to this with so much pleasure, for it was our little girl's first semi-grown-up party; and then my husband had spoiled it all for me by being terribly busy with some business affair that called him suddenly away the very week we had set for the gathering. King was as casual about it as if it were not a serious matter.

How on earth was I to manage without him? Oh, there would be no trouble. Peter de Koven can go—he says he will. It will be all right. (You would have known it was a husband talking if he had been perfectly disguised as a wife!) I suppose my face expressed my feelings, for Peter looked at me and burst out laughing.

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"That's the kind of welcome I get!" he said.
"I have a good mind to say I won't go at all."

But of course he went. Peter is a host in himself, and is always included, by acclaim, in all our children's frolics; but he is not *the* host, and I dreaded that week in our country-house without its master present.

"Daphne and the tribe arrive to-night, don't they?" said Peter. "By-the-way," he added, "do I kiss Daphne?"

"Certainly," I replied. "So long as you care nothing about it and can't remember whether you do or not. A child of fifteen—"

"Is Daphne only fifteen?"

"Well," I admitted, "she was sixteen last month."

"In that case," allowed Peter, "you may still call her fifteen, to all intents and purposes. Look there—out of the window. What are these blowing across the lawn?"

' . . . all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils.'

I rose quickly and glanced out of the window. They did look for all the world like wind-swept flowers, as they came flying and

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swaying across the grass, their long, soft veils, their light scarfs and streamers "fluttering and dancing in the breeze."

The carriage was to have met them some hours later at the station, but they—Daphne and two of her schoolmates—had taken an earlier train, and, walking across the short-cut that led through the woods, were drifting in to "surprise us." I flung my sewing one way, my scissors another, my thimble spun on the floor, and I was out on the porch, Peter following me. As they saw us they ran like deer across the grass to the porch, laughing, calling to us; but Daphne reached us first, and was in my arms—my dear, dear little girl. She forgot her guests, forgot everything but that she was home again—the same sweet, impulsive child!

Afterward, thinking it over, I found I could not possibly remember how Peter had welcomed Daphne. The which only went to prove that whatever happened made no kind of difference.

Some day I shall have to begin to consider all sorts of questions, I suppose; but not yet.

As to the *personnelle* of our little party—Theodora, otherwise Dodo, was the oldest of the three schoolmates; indeed, she was no longer like a school-girl at all. This was her

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farewell school-year; she was now a young lady, or would be when she crossed whatever Rubicon of a social event her parents might choose for her formal introduction to the world. It would not be quite as total strangers that Dodo and the world would meet at that function—so I decided, watching her. She had seen something of life, lived it in snatches—stolen snatches, perhaps. One could see at a glance that she was a demonstrative, emotional girl, who could hardly escape experiences. She was full of the joy of living, and lived, for a girl of her age, a bit deeply. She was distinctly susceptible, not in any unpleasing way or mawkishly; but quite enough, so I thought, to fall quickly into moods that would let her enjoy to the fullest all the admiration she excited. She was too well aware of her own charms—indeed, they were no slight possession. Had she been my daughter—but she was not my daughter, and I had no duty upon me to mould her character, only to care for her while she was under my roof.

The third of this trio was a nice, quiet little girlee. She and Daphne were as two such babes in the woods compared to Dodo! I was sure no problems could arise in handling them.

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There were also three boys in our house-party—Jim Bonny, in his last year at college now, and the son of one of our old neighbors (an easy-going, rangy, companionable sort of a fine chap, so King dubs him—the description fits); Jim's college "chum," who took an immediate fancy to the quiet little girl, and who was not wholly unlike a nice, quiet little girlee himself; and last, Albert Wright, a stranger to all of us.

It is really rather unsafe to accept all that is offered us—socially at least. I don't mean that when we make offers to our friends we don't intend that they shall be accepted; but an offer slips out so easily. That was the way Albert Wright came to be one of our house-party. We had never seen the boy, and knew nothing about him except that his father was a partner of King's, and that his father and mother were both really charming people socially. They were to be out of the country for the year, and, as it did seem unkind not to offer to be good to their son in their absence, we suggested the boy might spend his Easter vacation with us; but if I had known that King was to be called away at this particularly untoward time, it would never have occurred

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to me to invite a stranger. It was true that I had not previously known either of the two girl schoolmates Daphne was bringing home with her; but I felt no great anxiety there—girls, with *any* social training, understand how to appear almost exactly what they know *you* expect them to be. Boys are less perceptive, and also less adaptable.

It was a great relief to me to find Albert Wright one of the most charming young men I ever met. I liked him from the first moment I saw him; I kept on liking him, better and better. He was handsome, quite a splendid-looking boy—I cannot help the fact that looks do always count with me—and so invariably well mannered, agreeably ready for everything and anything, which means much in a house-party. I liked his attentive little ways, too; he saw so quickly what was wanted before I really knew I wanted it. I was finding it hard to remember that I ought not to let this stranger lad step into the place of right-hand assistant, which properly belongs to good-tempered, steady Jim Bonny. I hoped Jim did not notice this—and I thought he did not. He is not very quick to see, dear, good boy as he is.

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It seemed to me that everything was moving as smoothly as a house-party could possibly progress—and then suddenly things began to go not quite to my liking; but the cause of this difficulty I felt sure I understood; and I believed that a hint given would adjust it.

Finding myself left alone in the sitting-room with Peter, I decided that this was the chance for that utterance.

As introduction, I sat looking at him in silence, my sewing suspended, with what I meant to be an expression of some sternness.

"Well?" asked Peter.

"You know," I answered. "Now listen to me. You are not to put ideas into that very pretty child's head."

"What child?" asked Peter, innocently. He looked the picture of guilt.

"You know," I repeated.

"Who? I?" he began; then, perceiving it was of no use, "Can't you see Dodo doesn't like me?" he added, weakly.

"Stuff! All women like you. When she appears indifferent—I've watched her—it's merely retaliatory. There's all the difference in the world between *retaliatory* and *initial* indifference. When your conscience has pricked you

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—your alleged conscience—then you sheer off from the child a bit; on which she snubs you, promptly; you have to sue for re-recognition; she slowly readmits you to favor—the cycle is repeated. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, unless you are in earnest. Are you?”

“Maybe I am,” said Peter.

“You are not. You have lost the power to be in earnest—I really believe you have. I wish you would untie that kink in your watch-chain. You have been worse than ever since you tied it there. I believe it really influences you. Albert Wright is the oldest boy here, the nearest to a man-of-the-world, and Dodo is the oldest girl, and a woman-of-the-world already. The other four have paired off naturally—Daphne always makes mud-pies—or their equivalent—with dear old Jim Bonny. When you monopolize Dodo, don't you see that leaves Albert nobody at all to play with—but *me*? He doesn't want me! He's beautifully polite about it—hasn't he good manners?—but it's hard on him. What chance has he against you—an expert? You ought to be more considerate. And then Dodo's too nice a little girl to be spoiled. At the best it's too flattering, young as she is, to have a man of your age

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and position at her feet—yes, that's your attitude, quite adoring. She must see how she attracts you."

"She certainly does," admitted Peter, candidly. "'I wandered lonely as a cloud, . . . when all at once I saw' Dodo! When she is tired of me (and she gets tired, just as she might of rolling her hoop), she makes no bones of showing me she's bored. When I have 'sheered off,' as you aptly express it, and she decides she's ready to talk to me again, she is just as naïve in betraying her willingness to be approached. It takes the youngest kind of a little girl to do all that—nicely."

"And the prettiest?" I added.

"Yes, she's pretty. I don't know when I have enjoyed anything more than this house-party. It's made me young again."

"You'd better enjoy it while you may," I said, ominously. "It is the last of Daphne's house-parties *you* will be asked to—unless you reform. There's one other matter I wanted to speak of to you. Martha, the waitress, has had quite an affair on hand with the coachman, but—"

"Now I draw the line there," said Peter. "You can't *Subrikinque* in all grades of society."

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"I am not pretending to interfere with them," I said. "I am only afraid they are interfering with me. Do you suppose Martha would feed him from the dining-room? I don't mean feed him exactly—"

"You don't mean water him either, do you?" said Peter. "If you are referring to the depleted condition of the decanters on the side-board, I beg to assure you that I, too, have noticed that shrinkage, and was about to hint to you that it might be wiser to remove the temptation. These are young lads here, and—"

"Oh, you don't imagine I suspected the boys!" I cried. "I know they wouldn't—not one of them—think of such a thing."

"I'll lock up the decanters for you," said Peter, easily. "Then you needn't suspect anybody. Now to go back to Dodo—"

"No," I stated, determinedly. "That is just what I have made up my mind you shall *not* do. You're spoiling this party for Albert Wright. Dodo liked him—I felt she showed good taste, too—until you began these absurdly devoted attentions. It's not fair."

"I'll be good," said Peter.

Why I believed him I am sure I don't know.

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Past experience might have taught me better. . . .

Something was going on in the house which I did not in the least understand, and every time I thought I was coming nearer to discovering what it was I found the clew vanishing. There was nothing I could take hold of; but I felt most uncomfortable. I wished, from the bottom of my heart, that King was at home. Perhaps it was a mere fancy on my part—but why was our house-party so remarkably cohesive? Of course, they are all very young, and it was just as well, better, that they should not “hunt in couples”—too much; I shouldn’t have liked it if they had, and should, in fact, have stopped it in some quiet way. But it was not I who was preventing “hunting in couples”—and yet it was being prevented. Whatever was happening, Jim Bonny knew about it, and Peter knew. Yet I didn’t feel that they had deliberately talked this—whatever it was—over together. It was a kind of “team-work” between them, with signals—not prearranged, except as all men have a sex-code. Men seem to be born with a power to understand each other—nothing said. It’s odd, too; for they

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find it so hard to understand a woman after the most elaborate explanations on her part. Perhaps the elaborateness of the explanation—but this is aside.

I caught Jim looking at Peter now and then in a quiet, watchful way, men's way, as if he were only waiting for some word from him—for what?

They both seemed to me as if on the lookout for something which they thought might happen, and they didn't intend should happen—or if it happened they were all ready for it.

If King had been at home he would have known just what to do. After a woman is once married her husband ought never to leave her—never. When you grow accustomed to something different, it isn't pleasant to go back to looking after things yourself—besides, you forget how to. I was almost tempted to break up the house-party—on any pretext. Yet that would have been, I felt, a nervous, hysterical thing to do. No one—certainly not Peter de Koven or Jim Bonny—seemed to be really troubled. The gathering was a great success—so I am sure every one of these young people would have voted it to be.

If Jim and Peter were watchful, they hid it

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efficiently from every one—but me. As I seemed to be the only troubled member, the sensible thing to do was, I decided, to wait and not watch too closely. Why should I watch at all, when there are already two such competent watchdogs on guard?

It was, at worst, but a tempest in a teapot, in all likelihood, and might be nothing.

“Where have those two been?” said Peter.

He had risen suddenly, and was looking out of the window at Albert Wright, who was helping Dodo out of the trap which he had just driven up to the front door.

“I thought,” said Peter, a frown between his eyes, “that Dodo was up-stairs writing letters this morning.”

“She was,” I answered. “Albert offered to drive over to the post-office for me—he is always thoughtful—and he asked me if he might take Dodo with him. He and Dodo—” I was determined now to make my meaning crystal plain—“seem very congenial. I think King would like that.” I went on. There was going to be no further excuse for blindness on Peter’s part. “Albert’s father being one of King’s partners, he would be glad to do something for

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the boy's interests. A girl like Dodo, pretty and so gay—and then she will have quite a little fortune of her own—the Wrights think a good deal of such things—would be a splendid match for Albert. They would make a charming young couple."

I really hadn't thought out quite so definite a plan, but as I put it in words, it more and more appealed to me. I expected Peter to exclaim "*Subrikinque!*" at once. To my surprise, he made me no reply whatever. He waited at the window watching the two standing by the dog-cart, and I began to wonder if it could possibly be that he was, after all, half in earnest. Dodo was a soft, fascinating, little thing. Of course if I had thought Peter really cared for her there would have been, in my mind, no claim of Albert Wright's that would weigh—but I knew he didn't care for her! She was not the type of girl that could, permanently, hold him. It couldn't possibly be anything more than a mere fancy, if that. It was more likely perversity on his part. He is perverse.

Albert brought me in the letters, and while I was talking to him, thanking him, I saw him, in turn, suddenly stand at gaze, peering out of the window. I looked up—there, cutting

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across the lawn toward a path that led through the most romantic of wood-walks, I recognized Peter de Koven and Dodo. They were laughing and whispering, and hurrying off, as if running away together.

After I had just admonished him!

I instantly made up my mind.

"Suppose you and I go for a little walk, too, Albert," I said. "That wood-walk is so pretty at this hour." It was in my mind that on our return Albert should be sauntering by Dodo's side. If I was not to manage my own house-parties, it would be after a signal defeat, with a fair struggle for the supremacy.

On the way to the wood-walk, there was a deep, wooded ravine bridged by a pretty little rustic bridge, which I never crossed over without remembering—there are so many things a woman remembers! Why I should have shared my thoughts with Albert Wright, I cannot imagine. What I said, half thinking aloud, I suppose, was no suitable remark. I deserved anything I got, I agree; but I had liked the boy; it was very easy for me to talk with him, he was that kind of nature—sympathizing, leading one on.

"I am so fond of this walk," I said. (Silly

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speech!) "The first time my husband ever kissed me we were standing here, on this bridge."

Albert's dark, respectful eyes were fastened full on my face.

"*Who* did you say?" he asked, politely.

I cannot at all remember what I replied.

We walked on down the wood-walk in apparent amity, while I guided Albert Wright to every nook and corner in that woods—where I knew Dodo and Peter were *not*.

Can it be that it is Albert Wright Jim Bonny and Peter are watching?

It has happened! It may have been a tempest in a teapot; I suppose it was. But when one happens to be *in* the teapot—

If a woman does not trust her own instincts, and act on them, she usually makes a mistake. If I had broken up the house-party, as I was tempted to (and one can always find a good excuse for breaking up anything), nothing, not even a teapot tempest, would have happened.

It was a lovely, warm day, like a long summer day, of sunshine, of softest air, and we were all sitting on the veranda talking together. The three girls were grouped on the steps, leaning

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against each other in that pretty way very young girls unconsciously nestle, as if in such union they found a kind of strength. The boys were hanging on the edge of the little circle, while Peter and I, as befitted our years, sat in comfortable chairs on the porch above.

Peter was supposed to be reading a magazine; but as I saw his mouth twitch now and then, I knew that he, also, was listening to the talk on the steps. There is nothing I enjoy more than overhearing very young people chatting together. They commonly select the most inflammable of subjects, and play about them with an innocent, if most alarming, fearlessness.

"Am I spending too much money, do you think?" Dodo asked of me, suddenly. As I hadn't the slightest idea what she spent or how she spent it, or what her parents wished to have her spend, I was ill-equipped to reply. At a venture I should have said she was spending more than any one should, of her age and inexperience.

"Do you keep any records?" I asked, evasively.

"Oh yes, indeed I do," said Dodo. "I set down every cent I spend in my account-book."

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This was so very encouraging I ventured to ask what she herself thought of the sum-total.

"I don't know," she answered, doubtfully. "I haven't added it up yet."

She turned to look reprovingly at Peter, who immediately suppressed his mirth.

"Father" (Dodo went on)—"I suppose he's added up the checks he's sent me—says I am spending *ever* so much."

"All fathers say that," stated Albert Wright. "They think they have to. My father says it—before he so much as opens my accounts."

I glanced at Albert, and, why I didn't know—he was no less good-looking, no less attractive, charming as ever, in his way—I found myself, suddenly, hating the boy.

It was, I knew, a kind of accumulative thing. I had been walking steadily toward that sentiment from the hour of the wood-walk and the rustic bridge.

With no more evidence in, I endorsed his father's conclusions. Of course he was spending too much—too much of everything. I wanted him away from Dodo, away from my girls—the same air and sunshine and atmosphere were not for him and for them.

The impulse was as intense as it was mo-

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mentary; it passed, of course, leaving me ashamed of its vehemence, but watchful, as watchful as—as Jim Bonny and Peter. It was, I was quite sure of it then, Albert Wright they were watching. I determined that I would have a plain talk with Peter de Koven. I would know, from a man's standpoint, what he thought of Albert Wright. The boy had showed me only one colored feather, but my flock of snow-white doves was my flock. It was Dodo, to be sure, and Dodo only, who was really involved. It was she who attracted him. Daphne and her little room-mate, babies as they repeatedly showed themselves to be, were hardly to be considered in the question. He cared nothing about them, or they for him. But Dodo—and what hadn't I done to throw those two together!

"There has been a tragedy in the house to-day—did you know it?" said Dodo. "Yes, there's been a real tragedy. Poor little Waitress Martha—she's so pretty—but haven't you seen how red her eyes are to-day? The cook tells me—"

Dodo is just the kind of girl all the women servants adore. They fly to wait on her. They tell her everything. They like her pretti-

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ness, her fluffiness as to clothes, and the way she asks them for things, so fervently, if it's only for a glass of water. She lowered her voice now as if betraying thrilling state gossip.

"Cook says the coachman is *through*. He thinks Martha flirts. He said last night, right out in the kitchen, 'Martha, you can choose between me and your goings on. You can't have both—see!' He's jealous of the baggage-man, I think. I've seen him making big eyes at Martha every time he brings a trunk. Martha has been walking around the house all day with her shoes unbuttoned—haven't you noticed it? Cook says Martha never can stand her shoes buttoned when she's in trouble. By to-night she's got to decide. Isn't that hard on Martha?" This last being addressed to Daphne, it delighted my maternal soul to see the child blush deeply and almost hang her poor little head. She couldn't reply. Dear baby!

"Poor, poor Martha!" said Peter, feelingly. "And she could have had such a nice time with all of them. Men are so unreasonable."

"That's just what cook says," said Dodo. "She says it was the same way with her, when she was a girl. She never had a lover—no,

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they all wanted to marry her, right off. She says it would have been so nice if they would only have said, 'Won't you drive with me to-night,' or 'Won't you go to the show?' No, it was always '*Won't you marry me?*' So she had no fun at all. She's awfully sorry for Martha; she says she knows just how she's feeling."

"And your sympathies?" said Peter, discreetly—"if I may venture to ask."

Dodo looked up at him quickly, her pretty crimson mouth pursed, her bird-like head on one side. Anything younger, more innocent, more daring, I have never seen.

"Of course I feel for Martha," she stated; then (where did she get her power of correct self-analysis?) added, practically, "but I sha'n't approve of any such 'goings on' at all, not when I'm just a little older."

She will not. She'll settle down into the most exemplary wife, the most rigorous of mothers; a bit too rigid, perhaps.

To this oracular statement of Dodo's, Albert Wright responded by an uncontrollable, high burst of laughter. He has a very keen sense of humor, and Dodo's remark seemed to find his vulnerable spot. His crowing laugh choked

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him so that he rocked backward, lost his balance and vanished off the step where he was roosting, crowded close to the edge in order to be nearer to Dodo. He must have hurt himself badly, for he struck hard on his elbow, and what he ejaculated I did not hear; but I saw another of those lightning, brotherhood glances, gone as quickly as it came, pass between Peter and Jim Bonny.

"Oh, are you hurt?" cried Dodo.

"I'm not dead," said Albert Wright, good-humoredly, rubbing his elbow. He picked himself up and returned to his perch near Dodo. "Thought I was killed there for a minute," he said. "Made me pray!"

He glanced up, sharply, at Peter de Koven. Jim Bonny also kept his eyes fixed on Peter. If Jim was waiting for any sign from him, he got no satisfaction, for Peter was deep in his magazine again.

The young people talked on.

"Now this is interesting," said Peter, suddenly.

He looked up from his magazine, and we all turned to hear him, I with a certain relief at the interruption of my thoughts.

"Here's an article on 'The Word or the

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Blow,'" said Peter. "Listen to this—a presumable conversation between the old generation and the new. New Generation tells the tale of an insult he feels he has been offered, and he asks Old Generation, 'What, in my place, would *you* have done, sir?'

"'Don't ask me!' says Old Generation. 'In my day we didn't stop for advice—we cracked the man between the eyes.'

"'It's not done now,' says New Generation.

"'So I understand,' says Old Generation. 'When a man insults you—it takes your breath away. In my day—we took *his* breath away.' Peter closed his magazine and turned to me.

"Now, in *our* generation—" he began.

"It seems to me you are very glib with your generations this morning," I said, rising. "Here comes Martha to tell us luncheon is ready." Martha's pretty eyes were red. Her shoes were unbuttoned. At a glance I corroborated both of Dodo's statements, and hoped no one else was likewise observant. I cannot bear to have the servants discussed and made conspicuous. It seemed to me that every topic introduced that day might have borne interruption. None of them appeared to me as exactly suitable for these young people; but, when I came to think

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of it, how few things there were that I *did* want them to discuss! Which only went to prove, I suppose, my membership in an older generation.

But the subject of the magazine article interested me, and after luncheon—I was first called away for some domestic conference—I went into the library and hunted for the pamphlet from which Peter had been reading.

I looked through the pages from cover to cover. "The Word or the Blow"—I could not find it in the index either; and was once again fluttering through the leaves when Peter came in.

"Oh, here you are," he said; so I knew he had been looking for me.

"I am hunting for that article you read from to us before luncheon," I said; "but I can't find it anywhere. Wasn't this the magazine?"

He glanced at the magazine, and then at me. "Let that wait," he said; "I want a little talk with you."

"And I with you!" I cried. "What is going on in this house? What is all this about Albert Wright? I want to know."

Peter looked again at me and hesitated. Then he laughed.

"No, you don't want to know," he said,

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easily. "Why should you? Albert's gone. He left all kinds of suitable messages for you before he went. He had just time to make his train. He's gone to visit some of his own people."

I sat down in the nearest chair.

"His own people! Why, what are you talking about? They are in Europe."

"I meant his own *kind* of people," corrected Peter. "He has gone to the home of a school-mate of his; he has visited there before. I know the household. It's all right—for Albert. The last time I saw the father of the family, he and his eldest son wore one hat between them. The son had on the rim, about his neck, the father was wearing the crown. They were a pleasing spectacle.

"Albert left all the proper messages for everyone in the party. I hope you will deliver them for him. All things considered, he hasn't behaved badly. He's held himself pretty well in hand. You couldn't expect it to last forever."

"But—" I gasped. "A mere boy like that—"

"Boy!" said Peter, tartly. "Albert Wright's no boy. He's a man, and— He's gone. Forget him."

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"Do the girls know anything?" I cried. "I wouldn't have had them suspect— There is nothing, nothing in the world so sensitive to anything like—like—this, as an innocent young girl."

"Except a nice wholesome boy," said Peter. "Tell the girls Albert Wright was 'called off' suddenly—he was! Who knows nothing fears nothing. They needn't suspect. You can trust Jim Bonny to hold his tongue. It's not his tongue that's Jim's ready member," Peter chuckled.

"Jim Bonny?" I asked. "What had he to do with it?"

"Ask Albert Wright. There's nothing decadent about Jim. He's a primitive sort of a chap. He and Albert went for a stroll in the woods after luncheon. They had words over something. Jim took exception to some attitude or other of Albert's. When I arrived on the scene—I was moved to follow them, as it happened—I found—never mind the particulars. The fashion in vogue seems to be—waiting for your man to cool down, then firmly rebuking him. It has its merits. Cooling a man down while he's hot has merits also, according to Jim. In Albert's case it was certainly effective."

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I looked down at the magazine I still held in my hand, and a slow, dawning light broke in upon me.

"I believe there isn't any article here on 'The Word or the Blow,'" I cried. "I believe there never was any such article anywhere. I believe you—"

"Well, I wouldn't 'believe' anything more about any of it," said Peter, "unless you want to keep it agitated."

"But King—" I still urged. "What *will* he say? Mr. Wright is his partner, and Mrs. Wright will be asking me—"

"I'll tell King all about it—you needn't worry."

Peter rose. Plainly our interview was at an end. That is what it is to be of the sex masculine.

There are times when a woman is as pointedly, if chivalrously, escorted to the door, showed out, and the door shut in her face, as if the pantomime were carried out in the flesh.

This was for the men to settle. They had, in their manner, settled it. I, a woman of some experience, supposedly, if I was ever to be, was to know little—fear nothing. Perhaps it is the best way, indeed it is the only way; but

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really, at my age, a woman does sometimes feel—but that may be merely the resentful stirrings of a perfectly natural but no less idle curiosity.

Certainly our house-party, from the hour of Albert Wright's departure, was as successful as any party could possibly be. Peter devoted himself, I might say lavished himself, for the amusement of the girls. There was no time left to think of the absentee. Dodo asked once if I had "heard from Albert Wright," but, as she forgot to listen to my reply, I let the evasive answer I was constructing trail off into an unnoted silence.

Why should Dodo remember a mere lad, while a man like Peter lay prone at her pretty feet?—where he really seemed to lie. Whether he was in earnest or not, I ceased to know, or care. I was too discouraged to interfere again anywhere or with anybody. Nothing worse could have happened than what I had left no stone unturned to bring about. I lost all confidence in myself, and the party, quite unguided, ran its own course, so to speak, by momentum—a brilliantly successful, if at times an erratic, career. Yes, it was a great success, but as I stood with Peter on the porch steps watching

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the last carriage-load of them roll away from the door, I sighed with relief, and, so sighing, registered a vow that I would never again give a baby house-party, not for young folks so very inexperienced—the responsibility was too great. Suppose Dodo had fancied Albert Wright. What a catastrophe that would have been! Suppose she was, even now, misunderstanding Peter's extravagant attentions, taking them seriously—or suppose she understands them better than I, and knows they *are* serious! What would her family say? It's no match for either of them. Peter's old enough to be her father. And, on his side—

"Give my love to *him!*" shouted Peter at the top of his voice.

He was answering Dodo's frantic wavings to him from the back of the carriage. I turned and stared at him, to find him impudently awaiting that look.

"What! Again!" he cried. "Tut, tut, tut! Dear lady, it's becoming chronic, incurable—isn't it? Yes, of course Dodo is engaged to be married. She confided that fact to me the day she arrived."

"But—" I stammered. "Albert Wright? You?"

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Peter looked sober for a moment. "I was a bit scared myself as to Wright," he said. "She didn't at all dislike him, did she? Anything might have come of that. I don't think she has missed him, though—do you?" he asked, anxiously.

"*You* know, quite well, that she has not!" I replied. "But how could she—an engaged girl! Why, when I was engaged—"

"You weren't Dodo!" said Peter. "What a shy, sweet little blossom Daphne is. She hasn't changed, not an atom, has she? She's still just—Daphne."

"I must tell you something," I cried, wholly softened. "I fibbed to you about Daphne's age. That is, I didn't tell you a fib exactly; but I didn't tell you the truth, either. I told you she was sixteen last month, didn't I? Well, so she was; because, you see, she was seventeen years old *this* month. She certainly had to have been sixteen the month before she was seventeen—hadn't she? You understand, don't you?"

Peter burst into his greatest laugh.

"Pooh!" he said, when he could speak. "Did you imagine I didn't know that? I had sent Daphne a congratulatory letter and a big box

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of candy on her seventeenth birthday; and I have here in my pocket-book the prettiest little letter of thanks from her. It might have come from a small three-year-old—as innocent and pleased as that. I'll show it to her some day, after she grows up."

I almost held out my hand for the letter; but, a little to my surprise, Peter did not produce it.

"Yes," I said, "the child is still—just a child. I don't think she has a secret on earth from us."

And then I suddenly remembered that Daphne had not mentioned to me that birthday letter or the box of birthday candy. I wonder why? She forgot it, of course. She is such a little, little girl; she is still just—Daphne.

I turned severely to Peter. "There are two things I shall never, never do again," I told him. "I shall never again give a baby house-party; and if I do, I shall not invite you, Peter. I believe in my heart that you have made love, more or less, to every girl-child in this party. And I *know* it was you who got up that prize-fight in the woods."

Peter looked depressed for the moment.

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"Well, anyhow," he said, brightening, "there are two members of this effete and academic generation who know something more about words and blows than—"

"You only prove your membership in an older generation, Peter," I reminded him.

"It is a generation," said Peter, bowing low to me, "that I am well content to belong to."

VIII

THE GIRL THAT PETER BROUGHT

ENTER Sylvine.

It was Peter de Koven who first introduced Sylvine to us, appearing late one evening at our camp-fire (we chose to call it so, though it burned in the comfortable chimney in our seaside cottage) with Sylvine by his side.

He presented to us this apparition from the darkness as his cousin, and told us—I credited the story, why not?—that he was escorting her on her journey; but as a travelling accident had caused her to lose a connection she had expected to make, he had taken the liberty of bringing her to us for the night. Needless to say they were welcomed. It did occur to me that this easy-tempered, athletic-looking girl, distinctly handsome though she might be, was not exactly the order of young woman who is escorted from relay to relay. I was, also,

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passingly amused at the unearthing of yet another female acquaintance of Peter's. Seemingly a mortal who wears his heart upon his coat-sleeve, he is in reality a secretive being.

Daphne was away from home, but her guitar was there, and upon it, before we parted for the night, Sylvine played for us, and sang. Strong, good-natured, stormy music it was, yet not unsubtle and full of emotional power.

Daphne never got any such response out of her instrument. She never will. I am not sure I want her to—I know I do not. Peter and my husband sat and watched Sylvine with that indulgent, amused regard, as older men will watch such young creatures; as if not quite sure of approving what they may do next, but rarely, I have noted, with disapprobation for anything they happen to *be* doing. As I, in turn, watched Peter, it seemed to me that this was an odd attitude for a relative.

The first impression of Sylvine's personal appearance, as she shone in on us from the gloom that night, was its wholesomeness. She was young; but then age seemed no question for so healthful a being. She appeared as strong as a moose physically, but was beautifully formed, on the model of an athlete, with the supple

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gait, the clear frankness of eye, fresh skin and bright hair, of a champion in perfect training. There was almost an effulgence about her face, with its glow of brilliant health, of high animal spirits. Her easy motions, these certain, swift gestures that are born of strength alone, were a joy to me to watch. But the next morning, when we were to see Sylvine in what I could only feel was her native element, the salt water, this impression of physical prowess faded before her glowing beauty.

Quick and graceful as the girl was on earth, in the water all her motions underwent a subtle change to the very fishes' curved languorous grace or darting swiftness. Her color softened, her eyes deepened; her ready laugh gained music and freedom. I have never, as it seemed to me, seen any human being swim before—not as Sylvine could swim.

Peter and my husband stood, like two women, up to their knees in water, gaping at her. I had lent her my bathing-suit. I felt that I could never wear it again; the contrast was too little in my favor.

"What have you brought us?" I whispered to Peter. "*Is your cousin a Nixie?*"

"I—don't know," answered Peter, soberly.

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"If either Nixie or Neckan, I should say the latter," he added.

When, a little later, Sylvine joined us—dripping, glowing, laughing—her strong, bare arms, her water-freshened skin and hair, her look of splendid strength, all bore out her carelessly dropped testimony that, through missing her train-connection, she had lost the chance of gaining one more medal which she had hoped to swim for that morning.

A few questions—and we understood. Un-awares, we were entertaining the champion young-woman swimmer of our coast; an amateur, to be sure, but with the possibility of an international reputation already staring her in her handsome face. I don't know what told me, something in Peter's astonished gaze upon her, a sudden suspicion leaped into my mind, and, a few moments after my flash of inspiration I drew Peter aside.

"Your cousin—" I said. "She interests me, Peter—" And that was as true as what I next stated was false. "Daphne comes home to-morrow," I added. "It would be nice—you would like it, wouldn't you?—to have the two girls, Daphne and your cousin, know each other. Shall I ask your cousin to stay?"

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"She's not my cousin," said Peter, bluntly. "I don't know who she is. I never saw her before last night. You don't mean your husband hasn't told you? I gave him the whole tale as soon as we got here. Perhaps he thought you'd rather not know until she had gone. She goes at noon."

Then he told me all that had happened, from the moment when, on his way to visit us, he had stepped into the little flag-station where every summer we kill interminable hours awaiting the convenience of the country railroad that takes us to a steamboat which, in turn, pokes its leisurely way along the coves, finally landing us somewhere within a long, driving distance of our island camp. There never was a lovelier, a lonelier, a more complicated small journey.

Standing under the smoky light of the waiting-room lamp, Peter had found Sylvine, and overheard her talking to the agent. She had mistaken this flag-station for one farther along the line, and, with no luggage, it was before her to spend the night in that not too savory little town. It was proper that Peter should step forward and offer his services, eminently suitable that he should have brought her to us

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for shelter; but why on earth had he presented her to us as his cousin? And how had he induced the girl to take that intricate journey in the company of a perfect stranger?

"I told her," he said. "She knew what she had to face—the train—the steamboat—that drive across the island—I painted it all honestly, as black and as bad as it was. She had half an hour to think it over before our train came. I paced up and down under the lamplight, where she could see me for a villain—or trust me. She came over to me ten minutes before the train was due and accepted my offer to bring her here to you, on condition that I'd give you to understand she was my cousin. You can see for yourself she's not the kind to consent to throwing herself on any woman's mercy."

He was right. There was nothing of the suppliant about Sylvine.

"You aren't angry?" said Peter.

"No—o," I answered. "I don't see how you could have managed otherwise. There was the girl, a wilful one, there were you, and here were we; but—I wonder how many girls would have taken that journey with you?"

"Few," said Peter, briefly.

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Plainly she was only adventurous; but, heavens! how adventurous she was!

Sylvine left us that day at noon, Peter escorting her, still presumably his cousin, to the flag-station from whence he had rescued her the night before. I supposed, and with a real regret, which I had not known I should feel, that I had seen the last I should ever behold of our Neckan.

Not at all.

The next winter, visiting in a distant city, I beheld—her handsome head up, that same magnificent gait—Sylvine entering the drawing-room where I was receiving with my hostess. No myth, no Neckan at all, she proved to be a young woman of fashion, connected, and by close earthy ties, with my hostess.

The girl had, I discovered, been offered the freedom of every advantage in life, nibbled at each and tossed it aside. She had managed, somehow, to graduate from a college; had travelled; seen all the social life they could persuade her to embark upon; and now, at some twenty-five years of age, regarded with satisfaction, as a final life-work, her fair chance of becoming the champion young-lady swimmer of the world—a notoriety in no wise acceptable

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to Sylvine's friends and family, not that their attitude seemed in the least to interest her.

I met Sylvine quite often in my visit to her city. I never was close enough to her to feel that I knew her; but I grew to *want* to understand her. If she had no heart, why was I always wondering when it would be found, whose hands—whose heart—would be warmed at its warmth? There was ever for me an impression of a sleeping woman here. An underlying something in the girl appealed to me. I felt she would repay awakening. Otherwise, I could hardly have invited her to visit me. One does not quite use hospitality as a mere means of academic research.

It was just one year later than when Sylvine first made her dramatic entrance in our midst, and we were at our island camp again, when she came to stay with me.

“Who lives everywhere, lives nowhere.”

Sylvine has no home that I can discover. Once she remarked to me that she thought she had a better time than almost any girl she knew. “I’m hardly home at all,” she said, as if that summed up the total of any woman’s happiness. When she is not hurrying about

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the country, "lifting"—as she expresses it—cups and medals, she is taking what she seems to regard as a well-earned rest, visiting her friends. I asked Sylvine to the island in the absence of all my family, except our small boys; but she knew exactly what she was coming to, for I told her—the utter quiet, no diversions, nothing but the salt waters, the green trees, and my society all the long, lovely days. Yet she accepted delightedly. I had felt I ought to know her by this means, if she could be known. . . .

Having taken all possible pains to arrange for a date when I thought no one would interrupt us, it was not, then, a welcome sound to me, on the second night after Sylvine's arrival, to hear a murmuring on the wind, too instantly recognized. Peter de Koven has the mellowest whistle, and it is his habit, as he drives in, to whistle his way up the road to our camp.

He must, I knew, have walked across the island, for he had not notified us to have the team meet him at the steamer-landing. If he had done so I should certainly have telegraphed to him to stay away.

I met Peter at the door of the cottage and,

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whispering, told him who was with me. "I never heard your whistle so out of tune," I said, frankly. "Why did you run in to-night? I wanted Sylvine all to myself."

"Why did you invite her here?" asked Peter.

The question made me pause a moment before I replied.

"I asked her—" I said. "I asked her—because she interests me so, Peter."

"She interests *me* so," said Peter.

As he stood there under the light of the hall-way lamp, laughing down at me, I knew whom he had come to see.

"But who told you she was here?" I cried.

"She did," said Peter.

I put it to any impartial judge: was I not progressing a little rapidly in that knowledge of Sylvine which I desired to gain?

I learned later that these two had corresponded, in a desultory kind of way, ever since that first accidental meeting. There was, of course, no reason why Sylvine in her letters to Peter should have refrained from a casual mention of the fact that she was coming to visit me.

"I only meant to stay this one night," coaxed Peter. "I shall go away again to-morrow—early."

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I did not contradict him, not then; but the next morning, such is the contrariety of childhood, one of my small boys seized this opportunity to drop out of a tree, and what with the fright and the hot-water treatments on the very sore knee of a very small boy, I found myself imploring Peter to remain with us and take Sylvine's entertainment off my hands, which he seemed most willing to agree to do.

A pending crisis came and went, suddenly. It was all like a dream to me, and it happened, too, in that strangely simple and swift way, as things heap up and up in dreams.

Sylvine was rowing in our dory, alone, near the breakwater sand-bar. She was inside the bar when we had last glanced toward her.

Peter de Koven and I were sitting on the beach, talking together, of Sylvine, as it happened.

"You don't understand her, not at all," Peter was saying. "The trouble is you won't accept her as what she claims to be—a boy. A boy she is. You can't judge her by your standards."

He broke off suddenly and sprung to his feet. Before I quite knew what the danger

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was, in part it had been met. I saw Peter, in our lightest tender, rowing like mad, wind and tide with him, following Sylvine. How her dory had become so small suddenly, so far away beyond the bar, I could not understand. When Peter reached the dory he made a spring and landed, his oars in his hands, in the boat beside Sylvine. The empty little tender rocked and floated, unheeded, out of sight. Not very much later the dory followed the tender, though I watched the dip, dip, dip of the four steady oars in Peter's and Sylvine's hands. The bow of their dory was still pointing toward our camp, the oars moved, yet they drifted, remorselessly, backward. Pulled out to sea by the racing tide, swept out by the wind, wrapped in a quickly falling darkness, they vanished.

I turned and looked back at the land. Two wood-lots met in a kind of fork beyond our cottage, and in that angle rested the summer hurricane. It seemed to be caught there, as if in a crevice, but every moment it was swelling into a blacker and heavier cloud-bank. We had been sitting under a rock and had seen nothing of this gathering danger. I rose and ran toward the cottage. The wind struck me

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full in the face. It strangled me. In five minutes a gale was blowing—off land.

"No, you don't quite yet understand her," said Peter. "I doubt if you ever could." He settled deeper into his comfortable chair before the fire. I nodded, agreeing. "She's what I told you—a boy," said Peter. "I ought to know. No, she's not a Nixie, she's a Neckan—but she's all right."

"Yes," I said. "I don't understand her; but if you do, Peter, it is all right."

"She gave me no trouble. She behaved magnificently to-night," said Peter. "Sylvine is all right!" he repeated, with emphasis, and again I agreed, as I would have to anything on earth he had that night promulgated as to Sylvine.

He had saved her life, there was small doubt of that—and more. He had brought her in by the sheer will of a man, as it seemed to me, fighting all the elements.

Those hours up to midnight, while I paced the floor, hearing always the wind, the water; pausing only to heap wood on the huge fire playing on the hearth, to heat blankets, to keep water boiling, waiting in what agony every such watcher knows, I shall never forget.

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How will Peter, how will Sylvine, remember them?

He had made shore farther along down the island, taking advantage of some backward swirl of these tides, with which he is familiar, and they had battled their way home against the gale, almost as fierce on land as at sea, and burst in on me to laugh and laugh at my heroic preparations. How unnecessary they were!

Sylvine looked—I can see her now—those eyes, her wet, hot, beautiful face, her hair wind-blown and tossed. She was mockingly, vividly alive, awake from head to foot, as if she were imperishable.

No, she wasn't tired, not wet enough to count, not anything that mattered. Bed? She never was less sleepy! She was never before so bewilderingly lovely, so strong, as she sat there by the fire, the water streaming, unheeded, from her garments—and I don't remember that I was ever more wretched than while I tended the two wanderers, feeding them, warming them, listening to their story. There was little to tell: the old, old tale of the right man in the right—or was it the wrong?—place.

"He was wonderful," whispered Sylvine. "I didn't know it was in him. He has such sleepy

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eyes, such—such—*elaborate* features. You know what I mean."

Yes, I knew what she meant.

I got her to bed at last by sheer hostess' privilege of authority. I think she would have stayed up all night. She was wild with excitement, and—what else, I hardly knew.

Then I sat with Peter over the fire, and we looked at each other, and he stated what I have recorded, although I had said nothing. He was not excited, not one particle.

"No, you don't understand her," he said. "It was nothing to her whether we made land or not—or when; this week, next—it was all one to her. She doesn't know what fear is, fear of anything, of any kind. I might as well have been another woman, or she a man, so far as she was concerned."

I sat and looked at him across the hearth—blind, satisfied Peter!—and said not one word. I think he thought I agreed with him.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked, presently; and Peter looked up at me. He seemed, then, to half understand.

"Why are you warning me? For her sake—or mine?" he asked.

"Hers," I answered, carefully. "You tell

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me I fail to understand her. You ask me to believe the girl is no woman at all. Could any woman go through—all you and she went through, to-night, and feel—not even gratitude? You have placed her, at the least, under some little obligation to you—” And then a sudden impulse seized me. “Why don’t you marry her, Peter?” I cried. “You’ve saved her from any real obligation to you. You can honorably ask her. You could make her happy; it’s in you to make any woman happy. With such a good excuse as gratitude, such a plausible reason to give herself, I feel she might say—yes. I don’t mean she’s in love with you. I don’t mean that—but you have caught her attention. She charms you. Ask her. I think—she won’t say—*no*.” A long silence, then:

“There is one insurmountable obstacle,” said Peter. “Not that I agree she might have me—she wouldn’t. I don’t want to marry her.”

“Why?” I cried. “You admire her. You’ve been through such danger together, and there’s nothing like that—it’s almost inevitable—unless a man loves greatly elsewhere—to—”

Peter rose quickly. “I don’t know what you mean to do,” he said. “I’m going to bed.

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I'm getting too old and stiff for these knight-errant expeditions. Good-night."

And then I could have bitten my tongue out!

A great love—a love that protects him from all invasions — for whom? He is no longer young; it is, perhaps, some secret, buried vision of the past that holds him. So to-night—but there was to-morrow, to-morrow when he must again meet Sylvine. A dream rival—what chance had she, if Peter could once be brought to understand this breathing, vital creature? A boy indeed! "Peter," I ventured, softly, "wait one moment. It's you—you who won't understand Sylvine. If you would only forget this preconceived notion you have of her—I have watched her for days—she—she is yours, Peter, if you will only take her. I don't know how you have done it. I don't know how I know it. I don't think she quite understands it is so; but—Peter, you could make, oh, everything of her! Your lightest word would be law to her."

Peter turned and looked at me. "If I thought you were right—" he began, deliberately—"but, my friend, you are wrong. Wait until the morning; you'll see how she meets

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me then. It will be as a Neckan, a boy. Good-night."

Left alone over the fire, my thoughts went back again, again to Sylvine. Was I wrong—Peter de Koven right?

Is it possible that women there are, and that Sylvine is one of them, who are Neckans, who have nothing of the woman left in them? Would Sylvine have cared not at all, as Peter claimed, whether they did or did not make land—was he to-night but as another woman to her?

Then my own voice, speaking rapidly, firmly, aloud in the fire-light, startled me. What I heard myself saying startled me yet more.

"Yes, she would have cared, she would have cared greatly—if they had made land too soon."

I banked the ashes on the fire and stole to my room quietly, the tones of my own voice haunting me.

The next morning, before any of us came down-stairs, Sylvine had gone. The note she left for me was short and plain-spoken. She had "troubled me long enough," she wrote; "this was the best way."

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As I stood there reading, re-reading, her letter, all my old belief in Sylvine came rushing back to me, strengthened, deepened; belief in that underlying something—tenderer, far more womanly, than she had ever confessed to any one—least of all to herself.

Awake through the watches of that night—alone—face to face, at last, with that Sylvine to whom I believed I had long since dimly penetrated—what had the girl's thoughts been—what the struggle that led to this unselfish flight? Yet, and strangely enough, for the first time since I had known her I felt no uneasiness whatever about Sylvine, only a sense of abiding relief concerning her.

Suffer in this renunciation she must; but how strong, how fine, above all, how honorably delicate she was, at test, proving herself! The silence was left to Peter—to break or to maintain, as he should choose.

To fly temptation, leaving a cup untasted—many have that strength. To taste, to feel in every vein, to fly (her flight was confession), longing the while to feel again what we have felt—have many that power? It was Sylvine's, or so I read her letter.

I gave the note, in silence, to Peter; and,

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breathless, watched him while he read. Would he—if he wished to do so there was no reason on earth to prevent him—would he follow her? He looked up at me—and I knew he was still blind, satisfied.

“What did I tell you?” he said; but he spoke with feeling.

There was no message for him in the letter. He was left as free as air. Sylvine’s strong hand—the hand of a sensitive woman, at last—had closed the door on this episode.

IX

MADE IN HEAVEN



SOMETIMES think," announced Sweetie van Rustle, "that watching married people is for all the world like seeing our neighbors go down the hill under our dining-room windows. I know them by the way they take that hill. Some go down in such splendid shape; some—just go down the hill; some go down like a ten-dollar horse; some roll down. Don't you think that's about the way it is with married life?" I was spared a reply by Sweetie's not waiting for an answer.

"I call it dreadful," she continued, "dreadful! Just when we know least about—anything, we have to marry. Isn't that a topsyturvy plan? We ought to marry at the ends of our lives, of course, after we know what we want, not at the beginning.

"I've never been married—and we're taught

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it's exceedingly indelicate to talk too much about such things; then how in the world am I to be expected to know what I ought to want—or who I do want? How did you know?"

At this startlingly direct question I hedged promptly.

"You have no mother, Sweetie. If you had your mother to talk with, you would find it so different."

"Does Daphne talk over these things with you?" inquired Sweetie.

"No-o," I admitted. The question startled me. In that moment of swift searching through my memory, I could not recall a single instance when I had directly discoursed on any such questions with Daphne.

She was so young, surely I was justified in waiting. Yet, when I come to think of it, Sweetie was not so many years older than my own little girl. Also, whatever Daphne might be thinking, it was by no means true that such ideas regarding her were absent from my mind. As a matter of fact, had I not already picked out for her (the pride of our hearts, our first born) the husband I ardently wanted for her? This would be, it seemed to me, one of those

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matches made in heaven—not that I wasn't giving it a little earthly aid. We had known Jim Bonny since he was a boy, and all his people before him. He and Daphne had gone to kindergarten hand in hand. We had watched him develop from a quiet, bashful lad into the strong, resourceful man he was becoming—the kind of man any mother might “thank Heaven, fasting,” for sending to her daughter. Daphne and Jim were still as intimate as they had always been from the days when they played together, fought, kissed, and made up. The quarrelling had long since ceased. The kisses with it—so far as we knew. They were both quite “grown up” now, or thought they were.

My husband and I had never quite put into words any such project, yet I felt Daphne's father would not be exactly opposed to this idea if the right time came to present it.

When I told Sweetie she had no mother to counsel her in her choice of a partner for life, I was thinking more of this intangible, *Dea ex machina* assistance that most mothers give than of any direct verbal advice. Was I failing in my whole duty to Daphne? Might it be that she was looking, in vain, for some outspoken prompting from her mother?

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What if I tried now to give to Sweetie, as she seemed so to desire it, a little direct instruction, and, by that effort, learn perhaps how better to speak to my own child, if the occasion arose?

Mothers are selfish, but it was not alone maternal anxiety to gain practice in my mother-rôle that made me return to Sweetie with a certain excitement, for she herself is far too interesting to be looked on as a mere understudy for one's own daughter.

"How am I to know," said Sweetie, "that I want to marry at all? Did you marry just to be a married woman—in some ways it's convenient—or because you—couldn't help yourself?"

I gazed at Sweetie a little helplessly. As she had stated, she was unmarried, and she claimed a bottomless ignorance on the subject of the choice of a husband; yet her analysis of why one marries, if she understood what she had said, struck me as so peculiarly penetrating that I felt as if she had swept out of my mouth words that I might have spoken.

"I—I married—" I admitted, blushing provocingly, "because I—I suppose I—couldn't help myself."

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"How did you know you couldn't help yourself?" asked Sweetie, mercilessly. Then, not waiting for my tardy reply: "Our waitress tells me she knows she's in love, because her head hurts whenever she thinks of your butler. Is that love?"

"It might be," I admitted, cautiously.

"Father," Sweetie went on, "has been married four times. When my last mother died, Father told me—poor man!—that he was not only grieved, he was mortified. Was that love?"

"Only yesterday I went to see a girl I was bridesmaid for last year; she told me she believed her husband married so as to have a home of his own, where he could be as rude as he pleased. Is that love? They seemed awfully fond of each other when they married.

"Father came home the other day with the story of a poor woman who wanted him to get her a divorce, and he couldn't make out her ground of complaint. Her husband didn't beat her; he gave her plenty of money—she didn't seem to have anything to accuse him of. She said she'd 'los' her intrus' in him.' Father thought that was *funny*. It was tragic! I was awfully sorry for her. I knew how she felt. I wouldn't mind my husband beating or starv-

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ing me—but if I los' my *intrus'* in him— Is *intrus'* love?

“I know it's no sign at all that husbands and wives don't love each other—just because they scratch out each other's eyes. When I was a little girl I had a fight, every single summer day, with a water-snake that lived in a pool on our summer-place. I used a big bean-pole, and I tried my best to kill him. One day I did. I broke its back. And I cried and cried and cried and cried and cried. Father had to buy me a Shetland pony to console me. Haven't you seen married people like that?

“Suppose—suppose you quarrelled with somebody every time you met him? Suppose you didn't want to love him, and made up your mind you *wouldn't*, and were so sure you didn't love him that you killed yourself laughing at the very idea of it—and—and suppose you never thought of anything else, all day and all night, but how glad you were you'd had the common-sense not to love him. Is—is that l-love?

“They say there's 'all the difference between loving and being in love that there is between drinking and being in drink.' I've seen plenty of people who didn't know when they were in—”

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"Oh, Sweetie!" I cried.

"Well, I have," retorted Sweetie, "and so have you; so have all of us. Father says anyone can be sure he's in—you know!—if he finds he can't talk, or if he can't stop talking. Is a girl—in love—when she can't stop—talking?"

"Sweetie, dear child!" I broke in. "Come here! *Can't* you stop talking? Don't you want to tell me? *Can't* you tell me? You aren't deceiving me with all this nonsense. Who is he? You love him, and you know you do."

"No, no!" cried Sweetie, wildly. "I *don't* know. That's just the trouble. It may not be love at all—but—but, it keeps me guessing!"

As I took her in my arms, Sweetie laid her head on my shoulder and burst into tears.

"Do you—do you believe," she sobbed, "that people are happy when—when there's disparity in their ages?"

Then I knew! Peter de Koven is years, and by many of them, Sweetie's senior. They had been so much together of late, I might have suspected this—but I had not. There was the time, earlier, when I had half decided that he was interested in Sweetie; but, with later de-

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velopments, I quite laid the notion aside. The news came as a surprise, a pleasant one to me; for I was almost despairing of our old friend's marrying any one. What with his—let us call it catholic-taste in women, his ability to brush often near to marriage, yet invariably pursue a single way—I had begun to believe that Peter would forever escape. So, at last, that knot was to disappear from Peter's watch-chain! I realized, too, that this must mean that Peter himself would disappear, in degree at least, from our midst. Still, I had naught but "Bless you my children" to say—and a heartfelt blessing. In many ways this, too, was a Heaven-made match. Under all her nonsense it was daylight plain that Sweetie had lost her heart, and her whole heart, to the object of her declared uncertainty.

Beyond her flippancy, too, there is—I have always felt it—a feeling heart to bestow. "Whoever he is, he's a lucky man, Sweetie," I said. "A lucky, lucky man."

"Oh, it's not as bad as that yet," said Sweetie, wiping her eyes. She was recovering. "He's asked me," she went on; "but I haven't answered yet. There's a good deal to consider."

"Then don't consider it!" I cried, eagerly. . . .

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"So that's what you think, is it?" said Sweetie.

"Yes," I answered, "that's what I think. If you love each other—that's the whole point. You've waked up too late to part. Let us suppose the worst—" I went on cautiously, for she had not yet named Peter de Koven to me, and I hesitated to be the one to fit the cap in too direct words. "Suppose—suppose you found you cared for some one who is greatly your—your *junior*. That would be more serious, of course, than if he were greatly your senior, so we'll take the worst event.

"I couldn't advise any girl to throw herself in the way of a marriage ill assorted in years—there are reasons against it; but I am sure there are none that ought to weigh where two people *know* they have come to care for each other as deeply as I can see you—"

"That's just what Mr. de Koven says!" cried Sweetie. "He declares it's nonsense to hesitate. I tell him it's all your match. You did it—you know you did! Do you remember last Christmas, when Daphne was home from school for the holidays, and Jim came in to call, and after he left you told us—oh, all kinds of things about him? I don't think I should

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ever have looked at Jim Bonny if it hadn't been for you. I never thought of him except as the nicest boy—till then."

"Jim Bonny—" I repeated, mechanically.

"Of course," said Sweetie. "Who else could it be? I told Mr. de Koven—isn't he the dearest old fellow! I don't know what I should have done without him to confide in—I told him how you did everything to bring this about. For months I've never been asked to this house that Jim wasn't invited."

It was quite true. Our eldest boy informs me that when his monthly allowance arrives he hastens to lend it to all the safe boys in his school; there is nothing then left to lend when the doubtful borrowers come around.

In somewhat the same spirit—I knew it now—I had, in Daphne's absence, thrown Jim Bonny constantly with Sweetie—she being so much his senior it never occurred to me—I trust that our oldest son is wiser in his generation, selecting safer loan-deposits for his treasure than his mother proves capable of choosing. Plainly, I was not born for a banker.

I really behaved very well. If Sweetie missed anything from my felicitations, and I think she felt no lack, it was not because I failed to try,

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honorably, to play my assumed mother-rôle to the child.

She has drawn a prize indeed in life's lottery. Who knows that better than I! Suppose she is five, six years, more perhaps, the senior, Jim is already years older than she in all that counts—wisdom, strength, real experience. All this I expatiated upon to Sweetie. I said all I ought.

As for Sweetie herself, she will at once develop into that meek and sweetly obedient creature which every woman becomes who marries a man younger than herself. There is no such docile wife as she who is her husband's senior—the reason is obvious. Sweetie will gain just that little touch of yielding she most needs.

"Jim vows he won't let father make me any allowance," stated Sweetie. "He has about ten thousand a year of his own, you know. We must scratch along on that, Jim says. That's just like him, isn't it?"

It was.

"Won't let—must—Jim says—!" This from Sweetie, who has spent her father's thousands like water, and taken no orders from any quarter.

No, it isn't a bad arrangement, not at all;

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except for the fact that I—but that is to be forgotten.

From to-day, Heaven can make all the marriages, in my family and outside, with no assistance from me!

“If you, my dear, were my own child,” I told Sweetie, “I could only say that there is not a man of our acquaintance to whom I would so happily give you as to Jim Bonny.”

And I have never spoken a truer word.

X

THE SECRET



OME," said Peter de Koven, "the party's over; everybody's gone—let's sit down somewhere and talk about them."

"No," I remonstrated, "ever so many are here still. I can't run off."

"Nobody's here who isn't doing just what I want you to do. Look at your husband's talking-bee. And look at your daughter—tender, flower-faced little child—gossiping already, as hard as the best!"

I glanced about the rooms. Peter was right. In one corner, comfortably disposed, as if for the rest of the night, was established a little group of familiars over whom my husband presided—all wearing that air of gleeful interest we only exhibit when at the end of an evening we discuss its happenings in general; in particular, those that created them.

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On the wide stairs in the hallway sat my little Daphne and her youthful friends, chattering and gossiping as thoroughly as such young people know how to. It is better and more exhaustively done by their elders.

Each little colony was evidently informed with the easy spirit of the hour, that pleasant breathing space, when only the habitués of the house remain, when the caterers come in again with a kind of postscript-collation. Every one is pleased, those who didn't like it have long since gone home, and the remaining ones are just tired enough to be easy-going, to talk in confidences, a bit imprudently perhaps.

There had been more in this evening to excite and tire me than in a mere every-day ball. This was our little Daphne's débutante night, and every mother knows what that means. It isn't just "a ball" to the mother as she watches her child receiving at her side—but I had made up my mind that I would not take Daphne's début too seriously, and was a little mortified to find how relaxed and suddenly weary I was, as if I had been bearing up under a heavier emotional strain than the occasion warranted.

"We can have something to eat in the con-

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servatory," said Peter. "You know you haven't tasted a mouthful to-night." I said I thought I had, but I was quite certain I had not when, a little later, I found myself sitting opposite Peter de Koven and looking hungrily at the food placed on the small table before us.

Yes, the party was over, but the lights were still burning, the flowers were unwithered, music played, and all that was there for the pleasure of many, of light, of perfume and sound, remained for the few. There was no crowd, no hum of voices. The contrast of this atmosphere of surrounding friends, the strangers banished, was—what after a ball always is.

"The best part of a good party," said Peter de Koven, and I agreed with him.

"It's the easy time to talk," he went on—"the hardest to stop talking. Confidences—they come of themselves."

We went ranging to and fro, Peter and I, as we ate our supper, chatting freely on all things and nothing, when it was suddenly borne in upon me that it was for a reason he had possessed himself of my undivided society in this psychological hour. He had something to tell me, and only waited for a fitting opening.

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So soon as this was really clear to me I ceased talking, and sat looking questioningly at Peter, which was, perhaps, just what he wanted.

"There's one subject we haven't opened to-night," he said. "We have talked over everything else on earth, but we haven't once mentioned the South Sea Islands."

If this was his way of arriving at what he had to confide, I was quite willing. I distinctly prefer an uncircuitous route to any topic, but this was Peter's geographical excursion, his South Sea Islands, not mine, so I nodded agreement.

"We have rather slighted the group," I said. "I didn't mean to militate against them. Suppose you begin. I warn you, you'll have to do most of the talking."

"I don't know much of them myself," said Peter. "But I understand they are excellent places to keep a secret—if you happen to own one. I know of a man who kept his secret there, for years, safely."

"What was this secret?" I asked.

"Wait until I tell you," said Peter.

Then he told me.

It was a most amazing narration, true to the smallest details, he insisted. The story was of

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a young Englishman who had settled on a remote South Sea Island, and there, as a consistent finale, married in a moment of infatuation a native girl. They lived together, happily, it seemed, and had several children—all daughters. The children were physically very like their father. That may have been one reason why he suddenly conceived a fancy for Anglicizing his domesticity. To this end he quietly imported—his people in England knew nothing whatever of his South Sea Island life—an English governess and installed her, with authority, above his native wife. The wife—she appeared to have been a docile little creature—made his plan simpler for him by dying at the birth of another daughter. He then removed his formal establishment away from her and her people to yet another island where they were unknown, and where his home stood for that of a decorous English gentleman, his daughters for strictly reared young Englishwomen, living their rather dull British lives on their father's South Sea Island plantation.

An American had told Peter this strange story. She chanced to be visiting the island, and met, with no suspicion, what she supposed to be an interesting English family. She grew

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to know, quite intimately, the reticent and most competent English governess who had wrought this extraordinary race metamorphosis.

In one of the temporary absences of the master of the house—he had been called to England, as he often was, on business of importance—the American lady received an appealing letter from the governess, hinting vaguely that she feared there was reason to suspect all was not quite as the absent master of the plantation would wish. She wanted to know if her friend would consent to pay her a visit. It was plain she feared she might need support, even assistance. The lady appealed to read between the lines that in their father's absence the distracted governess was detecting signs of some danger threatening the daughters of his house.

"It's anything but a pretty story," said Peter de Koven. "There's no use in dallying on the details. The governess herself drove to the neighboring plantation to fetch her guest, and found she had made better time than she had believed she might, so back they drove that same day. They turned into a road which led through the bottom of the plantation,

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and there heard the most amazing racket, weird shouting, the wildest singing, the maddest laughter. The governess tied the horse to a tree, and the two women broke their way through the heavy foliage in the direction of the noise. They reached the bank of a little pond, and—you know the South Sea custom of fishing—men, women, children, splashing about in the water, switching the fishes, with rods, into the shallows, catching them, eating them—alive? That's what those young girls left in the charge of their English governess were doing. That's what my friend stood there and saw them do. Such a spectacle she said she had never imagined. Not a trace of their superimposed civilization was left in those young half-breed savages. There—among the native youths and maidens that filled the pond, naked, play-mad children of nature—disported the carefully educated daughters of an English gentleman, one with them, one of them.

The governess drew back from the bank and stood in a little clearing, her white face looking up at the blue sky. She said nothing, she only wrung and wrung her hands. It was all over. There was nothing for any one to suggest. I don't know what she cabled to their father; she

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sent for him that night. I know what she might have cabled—"Your secret is loosed." What do you suppose became—what could become of those young girls?"

I sat looking at Peter across the little table. Never since I had known him, which is fairly all of his life, had I seen him so moved. "Go on," I said, "you aren't telling me a ghastly story like that, to-night, for no purpose."

He laughed and looked up at me. "You have guessed it," he said, more naturally. "No, this isn't the story I want to tell you to-night. I told you this one first, merely as a kind of preparation for the real story. I've been uncertain if I ought to burden you—but I've needed advice, I need a woman's point of view, I need—"

"Go on," I said, a little impatiently.

"Thank you," said Peter de Koven, earnestly.

"Suppose," he said, presently, "that you knew a man—" He began his story as if he had carefully prepared it, and, as he went on, it was more and more plain to me that, in the telling, it was his intent to make an appeal to me of some kind. It seemed to me as a sort of advocate's speech, a carefully prepared pres-

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entation, intended to create the definite impression he desired to have made.

"We can put it this way," he went on. "Suppose I know a man who has waked up one fine morning—the guardian of a young girl. He hasn't sought the office. It was thrust on him by the ward herself. She knew him slightly, and, for some reason of her own, he was the guardian she asked to have appointed. She was to be of age in a short while. The former guardian—she had been in his care since her babyhood—saw fit to expire suddenly, just before his term of service had run out. It looked like a nominal responsibility. A few months, and the girl was to be her own mistress. Also, her marriage seemed not much further off. The former guardian was a business acquaintance of mine. As it happened, I had been on a brief business visit at his country home the summer before. I saw the girl there several times—once when she was not seeing me. She made then a deep impression on me, of a kind. I was strolling along a wooded road, and just ahead of me I saw two figures, a man and woman, break out from the bushes on the road-side. They were climbing down the high bank into the lane. The girl's foot slipped and

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she fell, with no great effort to prevent it, into the arms of the young man. He caught her and held her, plainly not for the first time. They were both laughing. He kissed her repeatedly. It was as pretty a wood-scene as you ever witnessed. They were both very young, perfectly happy, both deeply in love, evidently. The girl lifted her hand and—I don't know why the gesture touched me as it did, except that it was very tender and girlishly done; it stayed by me as a memory—she lifted her hand and laid it against her lover's face with an exquisite gentleness, the most innocent and pure expression of affection. I slid away into the bushes and left them there together. The girl was the ward of my host. Her lover—I recognized him, too—was a neighbor of theirs, the son of an acquaintance of my own. I wondered how his mother would like to have seen what I saw there in the lane. They came of an old, proud stock. The girl's family were not of that kind exactly, perfectly respectable, but not people of very high social position. The girl, so her guardian told me, was an orphan and very wealthy. She was, he said, the only daughter of an English father and an American mother—the latter a distant

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cousin of his, which accounted for the child's being left to his care. Of course, with the sudden death of the guardian, it was the duty of the newly appointed trustee—he took the office only because it seemed churlish to refuse—to open a safe-deposit-box where all the private papers were kept that related to his ward. There he found the gravest responsibility he says he has ever assumed. Do you know who this ward of his proved to be? The youngest daughter of our South Sea Island friend. This was the father's means of rescuing her—one, at least, from his brood. He had separated her even from himself, sent her to a new country, with a new name. She was to know nothing about her origin—never to know. The secret was to be kept religiously. It was evidently made worth while to her guardian to keep it, and he had done so—perfectly. But for the accident of his sudden death it is possible—he was clever in his expedients—that no one would ever have known the truth. The girl herself had not the remotest suspicion of her real identity. She believed her guardian was her mother's cousin. He was no relation on earth to her.

The new guardian has come to me for advice.

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The lover his ward cares for is, as you might suppose he would be, the last man, perhaps, that she ought to marry. His family—they simply would never permit it to happen if they knew the truth. It was his mother—there seems to have been a malign fate at work—she was the American woman who stood by that South Sea Island pond and saw this child's older sisters reverted to type. After that—I've heard her tell the story—no half-breed South Sea Islander could enter her family. You know how feeling runs on such things. There's no room for argument. Rightly or wrongly people care immensely, or they are more or less indifferent. When they care, they never change.

“What ought—what do you think the child's guardian is called upon to do? If he simply holds his peace, perhaps no one will ever know any of the story. Remember, this is a love-match, on both sides. If the girl's secret is told to her lover, his family must be informed, too, for he is very young. Then there would be no marriage. I am not sure even of the lover, with his education. Can you imagine a harder case—for everybody concerned? The guardian thinks he understands his ward; he

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thinks he might tell her—imagine the telling!—and then trust her to—she must, poor child!—dispose of her lover herself, on any pretext she finds easiest to still shield her secret. Is that the least cruel way out? Or should he do nothing, say nothing, and let events take their course?”

“Peter,” I said, thickly — the room swam before my eyes.—“you say feeling runs as to such things—as it happens; that people care or do not care. If this poor child’s guardian should decide to speak, and if he should happen to be a man who has never married, a man close by always whenever any one of us—any one is in trouble; so close that it seems as if he would always do anything, at all cost to himself, for one in distress—even to being chivalric in a way—that his—his old friends could not—could not stand for him— Oh, Peter—”

Peter stretched out his hand to me across the table, and as I laid my hand in his my fingers were cold and trembling.

“In any event there could be nothing like that,” he said, gently. “In the first place, her guardian is an old foggy to the girl. She has never considered him differently. In the

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second place, rightly or wrongly, he is one of those who cares, and—no, they never change.

“Abroad it is different. The guardian has a sister living in London; he thinks he could, if necessary, take his ward to her. He could arrange there for her to have access to unusual advantages, meet quite wonderful people. They are kinder, you know, toward this sort of thing. It would be necessary, he knows, whatever happens, however he decides, to be very careful—and, you see, he’s only a man. But he says he has a friend, a woman, he can go to for advice—a loving, tender-hearted, above all a safe woman. He knows that she will understand all he tells her, and more. His plan is to confide in her, in confidence tell her this whole story, and, if he is able, he wants to tell it so that it may deeply move her, because he may come to need her practical help.

“You see, this friend of his has a débutante daughter, a flower-faced, gay child, and it might be — it would be hard, the parting, I know, for both mother and daughter; but it might be that the mother would, if the need arises, allow her daughter to go also to London for the season. She would be just the kind of tender, wholesome presence needed—she has

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all her mother's power of sympathy—for a poor, heart-broken child."

Tableau on tableau the scenes of Peter's story rose before me. The South Sea Island—that wild fishing under the wilder foliage—and then the quiet lane, the gentle lovers. Back of all, deep in that tropic shadow, the pursuing, unconquerable secret that would not be kept.

"You haven't come to me for some one else?"

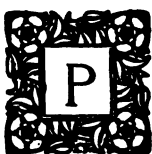
I cried. "You—I have known that all through—you are the guardian, Peter. And you aren't here asking me for advice—you wouldn't. All you want is endorsement. Whatever you have been deciding to do—" Again the wooded lane rose before me, the girl's sweet gesture of innocent possession. My eyes were full of tears as I sat looking mistily across the table at Peter.

"Whatever you have been deciding to do is already done.

"Yes," said Peter, "I— What do you think I should have done?" he asked.

XI

MADONNA



PETER DE KOVEN has a proposition confronting him—the education of little Tutie Stillwater.

The guardianship of poor Sara Stillwater's two small orphans having been thrust upon him, the future of the boy in the case seemed not to embarrass the guardian, but the education of the little Tutie, a mere baby still, already sits by his pillow and provokes for him sleepless nights.

"I've been looking into the subject," stated Peter, soberly. "Sometimes I am inclined to decide not to educate Tutie at all. Our grandmothers were left pretty much as the Lord made them. You can't improve on that ideal. Whatever else I decide on, one thing is settled—Tutie will not go to any colleges. I want her a woman, if nothing else."

I knew who was the causing source of this

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fling — Dr. Mary March, who is co-guardian with Peter for these two little ones. It is with her they live. Doctor March is a graduate of at least two colleges.

"What will Dr. Mary March say to this decision of yours?" I asked. At Peter's answer I had to turn away my face to hide a smile. "I think Doctor March will allow me to decide," said he. This was no news to me.

"What are you two wrangling about?" asked my husband as he came into the room. So I told him. Whereupon—I knew he would—he launched forth into his present pet topic, the permanence of the primal instincts. With the imminent question of Daphne's future education staring us in the face—that she is in London for this season does not, it begins to appear, exclude the question that she may be a candidate for further education on her return home—we have been obliged to look up all kinds of data, and my husband, through a process of the most elaborate and confusing deductions, has finally emerged with this touchingly simple conclusion: that it matters little how any woman is educated, because she is still created in the image of Eve, and competent, at a mo-

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ment's notice, to evolve as the most pronounced type of wife and mother.

I suppose it was a highly interesting discourse. Peter seemed to find it so, but for me—I was turning a corner in the birth-day gift I was knitting for my husband, and between my efforts not to lose a stitch, not to let the recipient see what I was working on, and not to let him know I had stopped listening to him, I wholly lost the thread of the argument. When I caught it up again my husband was laying down this law: "The primal instinct of every normal woman is to marry and want children of her own. I grant the instinct may be stunted to a mere stub; but the rudimentary development remains, liable to sprout, sometimes most inconveniently. Take the mala-propos lady who became a mayor and a mother on the same historic day. No, you can't kill primal instincts—"

"Oh, rot!" cried Peter. "I've seen it done."

"There's your manly friend, Dr. Mary March," my husband insisted; "you ought not to be surprised, Peter, to see her walk in that door in bifurcated raiment. It would suit her life much better than her present garb. I don't believe she knows what restrains her. I know."

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Her stub of a primal instinct won't let her exhibit herself to us in unbecoming raiment."

I had promised Peter that I would call on Doctor March with him that same afternoon, and I now rose, folding my work. "I do think, my dear," I admonished my husband, "that for a sensible man you certainly can—"

"Those are my precise sentiments," said Peter. "Your husband's a remarkably sensible man; but he certainly can—"

It's all very well for me to rebuke my husband, but when I do so I don't care to be agreed with, not even by our nearest friend.

"Not that he isn't perfectly right," I said, turning on Peter. "I suppose you haven't noted that Doctor March has changed her way of wearing her hair since you and she became joint guardians for those children?" She had; and the new way cut off ten years from her, easily; five she hasn't lived, and five she need never have admitted she had lived. Any woman, with just a little pains, can look five years younger than she is. That's a mere question of taking the time for it.

"I don't feel disloyal to Doctor March, telling you this," I went on, "because, though I know why she dresses her hair better and wears

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bows, she doesn't know. She thinks the old way 'caused her headaches' — or some such nonsense."

"Come, show me her hair," said Peter, rising.

"Now you've done it," said King. "He's never thought of Doctor March, or her hair, before. You don't know what may happen now. I never saw such a woman! Talk about primal instincts—yours isn't far to seek."

"Come, show me her hair," repeated Peter. "It's too late to hold back now. Oh, assiduous Subrikinque!"

It had not, until that moment, seriously occurred to me that Doctor March might really attract Peter. And yet—why not? She was not what I might have chosen for him in some respects, but in others she was quite a wonderful young woman. "Come on," I agreed. "I'll fetch my hat and gloves."

"Which, interpreted, means," said King, "that she has, in this brief passage of time, thought out your whole situation; Doctor March's qualifications; seen the possibilities of the future, the chances of the present; got her own consent to the proposition; and sees you now at the head of your table, carving for four

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—wife, self, and the two adopted ones—all so convenient and so happy.”

“That is not so!” I cried. It was true, however.

Our arrival at Doctor March’s apartment was upon a moment that did not lend itself to the inspection of a coiffure, or, indeed, to the consideration of anything except a fact that took the centre of the stage and dwarfed every other possible consideration.

“I have been sending everywhere for you,” said Doctor March. “It is providential that you have happened in.”

The only sign of agitation she showed told me she had bad news to deliver; she addressed herself to Peter, and seemed not to see me standing beside him. She had opened the door of the apartment herself, and as she waited there for a moment that pause prepared us. Doctors know how to do these things, quite wonderfully, it seems to me.

“There has been an accident,” she said, quietly.

She was the doctor on duty, and I never saw her to such advantage. The professional manner, collected, self-contained, became her. She was not at all a handsome woman; she looked handsome then.

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"Tutie has had a bad fall," she stated. "I have called in a surgeon. He is very hopeful—but we can know nothing, as yet."

I noted, mechanically, that her hair was dressed very carefully, and in the new mode. I didn't need to be told this had been done before the accident. She had no thought now for Peter, save as a possible assistance in the crisis. I liked her—better than I ever had before.

"Perhaps you can quiet little Tom," she went on. "Unfortunately, he saw his sister fall. They were sliding on the banisters, against orders, and he feels responsible. I can't calm him. I am almost more alarmed about the boy than for Tutie. The shock of his mother's sudden death, and now this—"

"Where is he?" asked Peter. He pushed past Doctor March as if she were a piece of furniture, and, once in the apartment, needed no further guide to the frantic child. We heard Peter's quick step in the next room, his voice speaking, speaking again, then—silence.

I have never understood Peter de Koven with children. I don't know what he does with them—nothing apparently; but he owns them from the moment they see him. My husband

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dwells on the primal instinct of wifehood and mothering; if there is a primal instinct for fathering, it is not a "stub" in Peter's case.

"Why couldn't I do that?" asked Doctor March.

I looked at her, and, though I recognized the genuine feeling in her voice, saw it reflected in her face, I knew why she had failed where Peter succeeded. It was all written there in her features. Fine as her face is, the expression is that of a man. I seemed to see then before me a most clever, keen, and competent masculine face, not at all the physiognomy of a woman. A stub of feminine instinct is left, enough to get that bow of ribbon into her hair, not enough to teach her how to comfort a child.

And yet—I felt so sorry for her! She was doing her whole duty, her very best for these children, but a man's best, helpless, as most men are, for a woman's best.

I have sometimes thought that Peter's power over little ones is due in large part to his casual ways with them. I thought this once more as I watched him come to join us carrying little Tom in his arms. The boy's face was hidden in his guardian's shoulder, his small hands

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clasped tightly about Peter's neck. Peter seemed to have forgotten that he held the child, as he stood talking to Doctor March.

There was very little left for him to discuss with her. She had been competence itself, it appeared. There were surgeons and a trained nurse at Tutie's bedside—almost before she fell, it seemed to me. I watched Peter's face clear as, at each suggestion he made, the deep, business-like tones of Doctor March responded. Every possibility he mentioned had "already been ordered." It was wonderful how she had thought of every detail, when her affections were so engaged, her personal anxiety so great. Of course, as a physician, it was her business to be expert in such a crisis; but I have seen men physicians who could not by any stretch of the imagination be called experts in their homes. Emperors in the sick-rooms of their patients, they become little short of hysterical with illness in their own families. Doctor March seemed more competent than she was really called upon to be.

"Have you remembered," said Peter—he was whispering to me over the child's shoulder—"have you remembered when we are due at your house? Look at that clock!" I remem-

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bered with a shock. My last words to my husband had been a promise to return with Peter de Koven promptly on the hour named. The engagement was highly important—some affair in which my husband and Peter were both financially interested, and in which I was involved to the extent of having to sign my name to business papers which I was to try to understand.

It lacked but half an hour of the time set for our return. How was Peter to be separated from the little boy? "Has this youngster had his dinner yet?" asked Peter; and instantly the child's arms tightened convulsively.

It isn't easy to "fool" children. They recognize those first little side-steps that lead to some final shift they are bent on avoiding.

"He has eaten nothing since breakfast," said Doctor March. "I had some broth heated for him, before you came; but—"

"My frote's sore," interrupted the child, unexpectedly. "Somefing's in my frote." No one answered him. Perhaps, at the moment, we were all in his case. Poor baby! It was such a brave, steady little voice, too.

Doctor March spoke presently in that patient, cheerful way which I have never yet seen have

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the slightest influence on any child. Had she cared for him less, I felt she might have been more successful with him. It was plain that she was fond of Tutie—Tom she adored.

“Oh, yes, dear; you will try to drink your broth for Cousin March, won’t you? Cousin March will get it for you in a pretty bowl with a lovely lady painted in the bottom. You’ll see her when you’ve finished the broth.”

“Sha’n’t eat it,” snapped Tom, and I couldn’t blame him. What did he care for lovely ladies—at his age. And this much at least I know about government, nursery or state—when an order is given that you expect may not be obeyed, the one way to issue that edict is powerfully. Then you stand an even chance of failure; but you’ve done the one thing possible for success. Well as I appreciate this kindergarten axiom, I am by no means able to force, at will, this power into my own tones, instantly as I can recognize it when heard in my own voice, or the voices of others. As Peter spoke to the child, and sharply, I felt that little thrill of satisfaction with which we all applaud the smallest thing well, perfectly, done.

Tom obeyed him at once. Sitting upright, such a small, dear little figure on Peter’s knee,

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he began bravely, trying to choke down the hot broth from the spoon which Doctor March lifted to his lips. She knelt, most pityingly, before him, holding the bowl and feeding him, until Peter drew up a small table and set Tom to work on his own account, taking small notice of him.

"There are some things a man does alone, youngster," he said; "one is—eat. Break your toast in your broth, and get to work. Tell me when the lovely lady comes out. I like lovely ladies." He turned to talk to Doctor March of ways and plans, speaking French, which the child did not understand.

There would be no difficulty as to Tom, so Doctor March assured him, if only little Miss Justine, who lived in the apartment above them, were at home.

All children, it appeared, adored her, and, as she had few duties to occupy her, except keeping house for her aunt, little Miss Justine spent hours playing with these two children. She might be willing now, until Tutie was better, to make some arrangement whereby Tom could stay with her; but, most unfortunately, motherly little Miss Justine was out of the city.

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"She plays with little Tom like a child herself," said Doctor March. "Poor girl! she has had no chance for any advantages in the way of education. I am sure she couldn't pass an ordinary common-school examination."

Peter gazed at Tom soberly. "She's what we want now!" he said. No, he didn't say it. He only looked it. I knew what he was thinking as well as if he had spoken.

The afternoon's revelations had undone any possible effect which the careful coiffure or that becoming bow might possibly have accomplished. This exhibited lack, painfully exhibited, nothing could atone for in the eyes of Peter; and with this object-lesson vanished as well the last chance of a college education for Tutie. Poor Doctor March! As she stood looking helplessly at little Tom, there was a wistfulness in her strong, manly face that told me she felt, and keenly, her own position weighed and found wanting. Perhaps she did not quite know what it was she reached out for in that moment of unconscious groping, or it may be I was fanciful and imaginative, creating a situation where there was none. I think I was right. She did not quite fathom what was in her heart. I hope she may never divine it.

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Again Peter glanced up at the clock.

Little Tom—there was no help for it—must be dislodged from his perch, and what then? Shaken, half ill, as the child was, he needed just the wise and tender mothering Doctor March could so well discern in this little Miss Justine. If she could so well describe it, why—it made me impatient with her—why couldn't she learn by imitation?

And then, just at that moment, the door opened, and we looked up to see some one standing on the threshold. It was a woman; perhaps she had the sweetest face I have ever seen, or, just at that moment the madonna type was to me the only one to be desired. The tender oval of the cheek and chin, the eager eyes—a woman's eyes—under that wide, low brow, the softly parting lips, all spoke of comfort.

There was something most exquisite in her atmosphere; you felt it on the moment. It seemed as if the eternal mother, manifested through our great need of her, appeared there, looking in at us.

"Oh, Miss Justine!" cried Doctor March.

Miss Justine came in swiftly to us. Neither Peter nor I had ever seen her before, yet we

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all three knew each other intimately. Her voice was exactly like her face.

"I have just come home," she said, a little breathlessly. "They have just told me—" She caught sight of Tom on Peter's knee, and her face altered. She came toward him with that welcoming delight children so love to excite.

"He mustn't talk," said Peter, gravely. "Not until he has uncovered the lovely lady in the bottom of his soup-bowl."

"My soup's et," said Tom, tersely. He lifted the bowl for inspection. "I've scraped all the clothes off the lady," he announced, in solemn surprise.

"So you have," said Peter; and Miss Justine laughed aloud. It was a laugh no child could resist. She stood looking over at Tom, with that delicious comicality still in her eyes, still that tenderness about her mouth, and held out both hands to him.

"Come here!" she said.

Tom dropped from Peter's knee, like a pleased robin, and hopped across the floor to her.

"I got somethin' to tell you," he confided.

Of course he had. So had I. So might any

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one. I looked at Peter. Might he, too, perhaps, have something to tell her? Was not this the ideal lady of his dreams?—a woman as God made her; so uneducated, Doctor March had assured us, as to be unable to pass the simplest school-test; untaught, save by the primal instinct that made of her the perfect mother, she gathered the child into her arms, not pityingly. She was far, far too wise for that—laughingly. She was holding him off, or he thought she was, insisting his “whispers tickled”; all the while she was drawing him closer to her, farther from himself, from the fright and grief his poor little heart had nearly broken in the holding. . . .

I don't know how long we stood there, furtively watching, Peter and I, before we stole away quietly and stood, our exit unheeded, in the hallway outside.

There we waited, looking at each other.

“Yes,” said Peter. “Yes—that's exactly what I meant. That's what a man wants.”

“We must see her again. We must see her often,” I breathed.

He turned to me and laughed. “The crooked shall be made straight,” he whispered. I did not need to glance at him to know that he was

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mischievously fingering that troublesome watch-chain. Would that I had never let him tie in it that persisting knot!

But the next moment he spoke again, and dreamily. He was standing listening to the voices—or the voice—within.

"She couldn't pass a common-school examination," he whispered. "Does she need to? Do you suppose, for a moment, that she could be—like that"—he nodded toward the room—"if she'd had Doctor March's *advantages?*"

"No," I agreed, "I'm afraid not."

"Good," said Peter. "You've had your object-lesson: Miss Justine on one side, on the other—Doctor March."

"Hush!" I cried, sharply, for Doctor March was hurrying toward us down the hallway. She had been called from the room earlier, and now was fairly running to join us. She did not need to say her news was good. Her strong features glowed with it.

Tutie had roused. As Doctor March leaned over her bed she opened those big eyes of hers and spoke. What she had said was characteristic. "I felled. Somebody ought to have been keeping care of me."

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"The little lamb!" I cried.

"The little limb!" said Peter; but we meant the same thing.

"Can Miss Justine stay on here for the rest of the afternoon?" asked Peter, abruptly. "Will you ask her if she can? I have to be away for several hours, and Tom needs peculiar care. She understands him—wonderfully."

"Ask Miss Justine to—stay—on here—with Tom?" faltered Doctor March, wonderingly, as if dismayed at such a suggestion.

"Why not?" asked Peter, impatiently. After another hesitation, and as if still dazed by the situation, yet unable to quite combat it, Doctor March moved away on the errand.

"She will stay," she said, as she came back. "She says she will be glad to, but"—Doctor March's face was flushed, her manner deeply embarrassed—"it is so much to accept," she murmured. "Miss Justine asked me if we would send a message for her. You pass near the Woman's College. Would you be good enough to see that the president is informed that Miss Justine regrets she cannot meet him this afternoon. If he needs the papers he wished to see, Miss Justine's secretary can give them to him."

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The president of the Woman's College! Miss Justine's secretary!

"Didn't you know?" cried Doctor March. Her face cleared suddenly. "I understand! You have been thinking she was the little Miss Justine?" She laughed aloud. "No, oh, no! This is little Miss Justine's *aunt*, the one she keeps house for, the new Dean of the Woman's College, the great Miss Justine. She is always lovely with the children, whenever she sees them; but she has so little time. She is probably the most learned woman, in her subject, on this side of the water—international reputation—foreign scholarships—honorary degrees—"

Doctor March was following us into the outer hall. Tales of flood and field in decorations, honors, Heaven knows what other recognitions, bombarded our ears as we escaped by the descending elevator.

I am not sure that either Peter or I bade Doctor March any farewell. I know we only agreed, mechanically, when she promised to let us know at once of any change in Tutie's condition. She assured us she was not anxious now, and we thanked her humbly for all, with a kind of dazed submission.

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We did not look at each other until the first street-corner was reached; then, as our furtive glances met:

"Foxed!" exclaimed Peter. He flung up both hands. "I surrender!" he cried. No more until the next street-corner, and then:

"Gad!" said Peter.

"I entirely agree with you," I replied.

Yet another corner, at which Peter turned to me, his eyes twinkling.

"I may," he said—"mind you, I don't say I will—but I think the chances are, when she's old enough, I may decide to send Tutie to the Woman's College."

XII

A DAUGHTER'S HEART



ES," said Peter de Koven, "your small daughter is evidently a success." He was folding a letter which he had brought in to read to me. It was from his sister, and full of Daphne and her little triumphs, the compliments she had provoked, and the attention she had received, mingled with praises of the child herself—just the kind of letter that should rejoice a mother's heart, yet mine was heavy in my bosom.

"As an experiment Daphne's London season, and from every point of view, has turned out a quite tremendous success," went on Peter. "I know it's been hard on you both—this separation; but the chance was something she ought not to have missed, eh?"

He spoke coaxingly, and I instantly agreed. Not every girl has such an opportunity to see

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the world as my little one had enjoyed. When Peter's married sister offered to take a mother's care of Daphne, while she gave her the experience of a London season, what could we do but accept? Even if there had been no other and perhaps better reasons actuating, we could hardly have refused such an advantage for the child.

"I wish," went on Peter, still as if wheedling me into a better mood—"I wish I might have stayed on longer in London to see Daphne through it all; but when I left her she was already well started; and she'll be home herself so soon now, she can tell you all about everything better than I have been able to. By-the-way, do you know you haven't once asked me, not once since I came back, how your *débutante* is developing as to looks? She was such a very pretty little one, it would be strange if she hadn't become quite a divine young woman."

I could make no answer.

"What's the matter?" asked my old friend. He was looking at my hands. I was trying to sew, but my needle was staggering anywhere.

"What is the matter?" repeated Peter; and when he asks in that tone what one's trouble may be— There are strong-minded people who

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can carry all their burdens and refuse every proffer to share them with the most wise, the most tender and discreet. I never was strong-minded.

I flung down my sewing.

"Oh!" I cried "I don't know what you will think of me, but I am so frightened! Daphne changes so fast I can't keep up with her. I had to learn to understand her all over again every time she came home from boarding-school. What will she be after all this experience? Suppose I *can't* learn to know her! Suppose I find she has grown—quite—quite away from me. You won't repeat something if I tell you it? Daphne had a room-mate at school, and once, when the room-mate's mother was visiting there, I happened to arrive at the same time, and we two mothers had a little talk together. I asked her if she didn't find it *lovely* to have her daughter coming home for the holidays, and—the poor woman!—she simply burst into tears. Then she told me all her trouble, how her child was—a stranger when she came home. It was like, she said, *exactly* like having one of her sisters-in-law come to visit her.

"One morning, when she was dressing, her daughter came into the room and said, in the

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most shocked tone: 'Why, mother! Do you wear your stockings with *holes* in them?'

"And she said there *was* a hole in her stocking. Not a large one; she hadn't seen it—that is, she said, she hadn't *quite* seen it—she'd been so busy—and—and—I can't forget that story! Do you think Daphne, my dear, dear, little girl, when she comes home, will be—"

"Your sister-in-law? No!" said Peter, stoutly. "I'll tell you what she is. I've seen her since you have—she's just what she's always promised to be, ever since she was a baby—the replica of her mother. Her mother is her ideal—and—" Then he went on, as only Peter de Koven can, to tell me what Daphne had said to him in his last talk with her in London, before he left her, and all that she, in her child-like confidence, had told him—too comforting for me to repeat.

"Little girls know," said Peter; "you can depend on them to find us out—every time. They aren't like little boys. You needn't worry."

"How do you know all these things?" I cried.

"Oh, I have been a little boy, and I have been a little girl," claimed Peter—and I almost believed him.

"Why don't you send for Daphne?" asked

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Peter. "You have been wearying for her, you know you have. You've stood this—just about as long as you can stand it. How do you know she's not wearying for you? In your place I should send for her."

I shook my head, openly wiping my eyes. "No—I can stand it a *little* longer," I said. "The trouble is, there—there are so many things to remind me of her, and I've taken up a dreadful habit of feeling sorry for myself. You know that's fatal! This morning, when I passed through Daphne's room, there, under her pink dresser, lay my old slipper-trees—the pair she stole out of my closet, naughty little thing, when she had her first dear little pair of grown-up slippers—and I sat down and cried over them. You see how silly I am! But I shall never forget the day I walked into her room and found those best slipper-trees stuck in her slippers. I knew what had happened then—my baby was gone."

"Nonsense!" said Peter.

"Oh, not at all. I'm looking forward to my grandchildren now. I don't expect to get much more pleasure out of my own children."

"Oh, grandmother!" said Peter, "you need a tonic."

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"Grandmother," I repeated, thoughtfully. "It sounds queer, doesn't it? I think, at first, until I get used to it, I'll call them all my *son's sons*, or my *daughter's daughters*. It's a bit less — *elderly* sounding, don't you think so? Then there's the chance of people not finding out the relationship on the moment, you see. They might even get away from me before they realized that a daughter's daughter is—a *grandchild*!"

Peter rose. "There's no help for it," he said, firmly. "I see what has to be done. Anything more morbid, more unlike your sane self, I have never encountered. There's a convenient chance, and she must take it, for Daphne to come home on the next steamer. Your husband and I—we have been watching you—were strongly tempted to send for her ten days ago, when we could have got escort for her; we talked of it seriously. This parting mothers and daughters—it's a doubtful business. You shall have Daphne back in ten days at the latest; or—you can have her now, if you prefer!"

He threw open the door as he spoke, and she dropped her father's arm, where she was clinging, and ran to me, laughing, crying, hanging

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about me—not my sister-in-law! No, not my sister-in-law at all, my own dear, dear little girl—my sweet, unaltered child, my Daphne.

“I know I am right,” I said. “It’s quite impossible. Nothing like that can have happened, for I should certainly know if it had. How could I help knowing?”

My husband looked at me in that patient way a husband can look and said nothing.

“You still believe it!” I accused him. “A mother surely ought to know her daughter’s heart. Before Daphne came back to us I was terribly afraid she might have grown away from me, but since she has been home—why, she has never come so close, I have never understood her so thoroughly.”

“There may be a reason for that,” said King. “Perhaps she understands *you* better, because there are some things she knows now she didn’t know before.”

“But she hasn’t learned anything new,” I insisted. “The child is as open with me as if her pure, dear little heart couldn’t keep a secret from me. Isn’t she the—”

“Yes,” said King, rising. “She is all that. Evidently you don’t need my assistance. She’s

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your daughter—as you say, a mother should know.”

I caught his arm.

“Don’t,” I cried. “It’s not fair to go off like that. I know there’s the sweetest bond between fathers and daughters, but when it comes to a daughter’s *heart*—isn’t it natural to suppose the mother understands? I can’t imagine what has given you this strange notion about Daphne. Why should you suppose she is thinking—of—of anybody, as she certainly is not?”

“That settles it,” said my husband. Something in his tone made me turn quickly and look up into his face.

“You surely hadn’t any special—any person—any *one* in mind?—had you?” I asked.

“I certainly hadn’t *two* in mind,” he answered. I sat looking at him with a queer, sudden little sinking at my heart attacking me. Was there more here than he had yet told me?

“You don’t think—” I said—the words came hard—“that—that it is some one in England? Will he take her—away from us?”

Then he told me, and I sat speechless.

“As for that,” I said, when my voice came

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back, "it's absurd." A load had rolled off my heart. I could not help laughing aloud.

"My dear," I cried, "are you going to be the kind of father that thinks any man, of all estates, who comes anywhere near his daughter is a threatening son-in-law? There's nothing in this. Do forget it! It would mortify Daphne to death to have him think it had crossed your brain that he could be looking at her—that way. He is double her age."

"He is double the worth of most men," replied my husband.

"He's a man of the world," I insisted; "she's a mere baby."

"He's a man of all worlds—any he enters," amended my husband. "As for Daphne, she is a woman, and—he *hopes* she cares for him."

My work dropped from my hands to my knees, from my shaking knees to the floor. I sat dumb and staring.

"I knew it would surprise you," said King. "I told him it would be hard to make you believe any of this. I couldn't credit it at first when he told me. He hasn't spoken to Daphne yet; but he thinks—she's not indifferent. He believes she will come to care for him. I think she cares now. I hope she does."

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"Daphne," I repeated, dazedly—"I never—saw—her—look at him—not that way—or he at her."

"It never occurred to you they might, did it? And you weren't in London, remember—they were."

"But, dear—he can't, he can't have our little Daphne. I'd hate to deny him—anything; but she—she's nothing but a child, our little, little girl."

"You were about her age when our little, little girl was born."

"Oh, but she's different."

"All mother's daughters are—different. And, dear, we must think of—Peter." My husband came over nearer to me, and sat down beside me. He took out of my hand the work I had mechanically lifted from the floor.

"Listen," he said. "Peter de Koven is old enough for both. We can trust her—so safely to him. And then—think how much we owe to him."

"We don't owe him—Daphne."

"I'm not so sure of that," said King. He sat looking at me ever so oddly.

"What do you mean?" I asked. My heart began again to sink. Then my husband took

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both my hands into his and held them fast.

"Haven't you—not once—so much as suspected?" he said. "But no—he's the millionth man; he would never have let you suspect. There is no one quite like him. I wonder sometimes how I ever dared—"

He told me then—everything—

I can't believe it. It isn't—it can't be true! I don't know how to bear it—what to think or feel.

Daphne?—of course he can have her, and all the rest of our little girls—if he wants them. How can we ever make it up to him?

I've been—oh, as blind as a mole. This explained so much—ah, too much! On my seventeenth birthday, it seems, they talked it over together, my old playmate Peter with my new lover. My old playmate said I had never yet refused to do anything he had ever asked of me, and so—he would not speak first. Yet he had the right, if it was true that he had cared so long, ever since I was a wee girl. My new lover was the stranger. It isn't imaginable—I won't believe that by any chance it could have been otherwise than it has been,

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these happy, happy years. My husband is the only man I ever looked at twice—or wanted to—and yet—and yet—

Peter told the whole truth when he said I had formed a habit of yielding to him, and I was such a child I suppose he was right to take that kind of care of me. The new-comer was to be the first to speak, and if I refused him—this was their agreement, Peter would not have it otherwise, nothing else was fair to me, he insisted. If I refused the new-comer, then Peter was to speak for himself. But I didn't refuse— Oh, no, no! Refuse? Why, when King addressed me, I fairly— No, there could never have been any one else for me but my husband. That is so sure, it seems a sacrilege, it frightens me, to think that by any fatal chance it might possibly have been different.

And now it is Peter who is asking me for Daphne—Peter, who said I had never refused him anything he ever asked of me.

“Is that you, dear child? No, you don't interrupt me. Come in, little Daphne, dear, dear little daughter. Are you really a woman, Daphne? They tell me you are. It seems only yesterday—I wonder if my mother felt as

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I do? I was only about your age, dear, when your father— Daphne, I have a surprise for you. When you go up to your bedroom, look on your new pink dresser— Ah, child, how we loved having your room all ready for you when you came home from school! The new dresser, the long glass—that tilts—you did like them, didn't you, dear? We thought you would be so happy in your pretty pink nest—for years, and years, and years, here with your father and me.

"I was telling you of the surprise—wasn't I? I've bought you the pink, rose-blossom hat, the one we sent back yesterday. Yes, I know, it is too expensive; but to-day I wanted you to have it. It looks so like you.

"Daphne, our—friend—Peter—Mr. de Koven is to dine with us to-night, and after dinner, dear—you may wear your new hat if you like—you may let him take you—there is an early moon to-night—for a little stroll out through the park, if you want to go. Yes, I know—but that was different. Of course, I couldn't allow you to go strolling out in parks—not with every one.

"You may go anywhere, out under the trees,

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or any other place—that—that our guest to-night—”

It was so hard to say. She was so young, so sweet, so little. I was trying to add, “you may go with him anywhere in the world he may want to take you—if only you *like* to go—”

Then I looked up and saw the child’s face; and—she was her father’s daughter! It was he who had understood his daughter’s heart. I took her in my arms; for then I, too, understood.

I have been taught my lesson. I have wanted Peter to marry, have prayed for it, yes; but it was not this answer to prayer that I looked for. I have almost said I shall never pray again.

It was not in my mind to marry off my own little daughter at eighteen. The rest of our girls shall be safe from me. I will buy me a muzzle if I cannot learn to hold my foolish, matrimony-praising tongue. No, I shall never be called *Subrikinque* again.

And yet—when all is said—it is a splendid match—for both of them!

A DAUGHTER'S HEART

Lohengrin and orange - blossoms, rice, old shoes, smiles, tears, blessings—

"Good-bye! Good-bye! Daphne, are you sure you packed your rubbers, child? If he isn't an *angel* to you, come home to mother, dear—come straight home. Good-bye!—

"Oh, it's you, is it? Good-bye, then, *both* of you. Take her! Yes, I forgive you. Yes, yes. Take her! You won't take her very far—will you?"

"As far as she will go with me," said Peter. "Remember, she'll never have another wedding journey—at least, I hope not. You don't think she will be unhappy?"

"I think," I cried, "that any woman who was unhappy with you would have to give her whole mind to it; but—"

"I understand," said Peter. Did he ever fail to?

"Just one moment, one word," I whispered to him. "Daphne can't hear us, she's saying good-bye to her father. She always loved him best. Why not? So do I.

"Listen. When you and Daphne squabble—oh yes, you will—of course you will, sometimes; you ought to—I mean to side against *you*, every single time. Yes, I shall. Daphne

THE IMAGE OF EVE

would never forgive me if I sided once against her—you will."

Peter turned and looked at me.

"Oh, no, *mother*, you wouldn't do that!"

MOTHER!



THE CURTAIN FALLS

